



SPECIAL MEETING OF JANUARY 10, 2023

Special Meeting of the City Council was held in the Council Chambers, Room 219, City Hall, on Tuesday evening, January 10, 2023.

CALL TO ORDER

Council President Kazinskas, called the meeting to order at 7:00 o'clock p.m.

CALL OF THE ROLE

Council President Kazinskas, called the Roll of Members. Eight (8) Councilors were present including Councilors James Boone, Ronald Cormier, Aleksander Dernalowicz, Karen Hardern, Dana Heath, Elizabeth Kazinskas, George Tyros, and James Walsh. Councilors Craig Cormier and Judy Mack were absent. The Ward 3 Councilor seat currently being vacant.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

President Kazinskas led the Council in reciting the "Pledge of Allegiance."

RECOGNITION OF VISITING OFFICIALS

President Kazinskas then recognized all visiting officials:

- Representative Jonathan Zlotnik
- Former Mayors of the City of Gardner
 - Alan Agnelli
 - Daniel Kelley
- City of Gardner Representative and Chair of the Montachusett Regional Technical Vocational School Committee Mr. Eric Commodore
- Governor's Councilor Paul DePalo
- Visiting Members of the General Court
 - Representative Kimberly Ferguson
 - Representative Meghan Kilcoyne
 - Representative Jay Barrows
- Leominster City Council President David Cormier
- Lancaster Select Board Chair Steve Kerrigan
- Former Braintree Town Councilor Michael Owens
- Westminster Town Administrator Stephanie Lahtinen
- Templeton Town Administrator Adam Lamontagne
- Athol Town Manager Shaun Suhoski
- Staff from Senator Elizabeth Warren's Office
- Staff from Congresswoman Lori Trahan's Office



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President Kazinskas then thanked all City Department Heads and Employees for their dedicated service to the City.

REMARKS FROM THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

Council President Kazinskas then welcomed Lieutenant Governor Driscoll to the City with the following:

“On behalf of the City Council, the School Committee, and the Mayor, I’d like to welcome the new Lt. Governor of Massachusetts, Kimberly Driscoll. While she has been in office for less than one week, the Lt. Governor has proven time and again to be a friend of the Chair City, and it is an honor to have her with us here this evening. The City of Gardner looks forward to working with you, alongside Governor Maura Healey, leading our Commonwealth.”

As we say here in Gardner, we are all Wildcats. On behalf of the City, Vice Chair Pelavin and I - both former Wildcat Basketball Players - and Mayor Nicholson, would like to present you and Governor Healey with Gardner High School Wildcat Basketball jerseys to take with you as you team up to move the ball forward in Massachusetts.”

Council President Kazinskas, School Committee Vice Chair Jennifer Pelavin, and Mayor Nicholson then presented Lt. Governor Driscoll with a Gardner High School Basketball Jersey.

Lt. Governor Kimberly Driscoll then addressed those present as follows:

“Good evening everyone.

It’s a pleasure to be here with all of you - the Mayor as he delivers his State of the City remarks - and all of the local and state officials who are here. Many of you know I come from local government. I was the Mayor of Salem for the last 17 years. I know the importance of the work that happens in rooms like this every single day. I’m looking forward to hearing your remarks, talking about not only where you’ve been, but where you’re going. You all know that local government is the branch of government we rely on the most. I think that why this chamber is packed, and frankly there’s an overflow room. It shows that you have an engaged community who really care about what’s happening on the ground. These are the rooms where we talk about how we’re going to educate our kids, keep our neighborhoods safe, invest in those places that really matter in our community, and how we’re going to look ahead as a city.

The Chair City has a really rich and proud past. How do we make sure we have a really bright future? I’m elated to be working with the team you have here in



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Gardner. I've had the good pleasure to be able to work with both the Council President and the Mayor, and Legislative Officials, thinking about how we support efforts in Gardner, in a community that, as I said, has a proud past but also has a rich future. I've walked the streets downtown; I've met some of the local business owners. I know that people really care about what's happening here and want to see that bright future. Most importantly though, you have aligned visions. You've got local leaders who are interested in finding ways to get to "yes" on having a shared vision for a community. For us, as state leaders, and I think I can speak for both the Governor and myself, we want to be not only strong partners, but strategic allies in that. We need communities working, and working well, to ensure that we have a thriving Commonwealth.

I am thrilled to be here only three days after I was inaugurated. In this new role I hope to come back here many times with a check. Equally important though, is bringing resources, is sharing in this work. We see local government and state government as having a symbiotic relationship. When the City of Gardner is doing well, the Commonwealth is doing well. We want to make sure that's happening. Thank you for having me and I'm looking forward to the remarks ahead."

REPORT ON THE STATE OF THE CITY

Council President Kazinskas then called on Mayor Nicholson to deliver the biennial report on the State of the City.

Mayor Nicholson delivered the report with the following:

Good Evening,

President Kazinskas, Vice Chair Pelavin, Lieutenant Governor Driscoll, Representative Zlotnik, other members of the General Court, Members of the City Council and the School Committee, Honored Guests, family, friends, and fellow Gardnerites:

INTRODUCTION:

One hundred years ago, Mayor Chester Pearson stood before the newly elected City Government as Gardner's first mayor, and delivered the first inaugural address outlining the successes of this community as a Town, laying out plans for the new city's future, and issuing a message of hope as they began the next chapter in Gardner's history.



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Two years ago, when I stood here to deliver this speech for my first time, there were only 10 other people in the room, spread out and wearing masks. Hospitals were facing capacity concerns, testing kits were at the forefront of people's minds, and the first COVID-19 vaccines had only just been released.

I concluded those remarks by stating that despite the uncertainty of the time, I was optimistic about the next years for our city. That our strength and perseverance would show our resilience, and present us with new opportunities.

I am proud to stand here today and say that we have stayed on that path and have set ourselves on a trajectory for continued success as we enter into the next century in our City's history.

SUCSESSES OF THE PAST YEARFINANCIAL STABILITY & TRANSPARENCY

During the last two years, we made great strides to improve our financial standing. The balance of our stabilization account is the highest it has ever been.

Additionally, our finance team has worked to make sure that everything is done to protect the taxpayers' money, and uphold our fiduciary responsibility to this City's residents. For the second year in a row, we received a perfect report on our annual audit from our City's outside auditor.

We're also making a concerted effort to return blighted and unutilized properties to the tax roll, increasing our revenue, improving our neighborhoods, and returning the spirit of our city to its forgotten corners.

SCHOOLS

We have continued to invest in our schools to ensure that our students have the resources they need in order to discover their potential and prepare them for future success.

After several years of planning and construction, the new Gardner Elementary School is now open to our students. This building provides a 21st century learning experience in an environment that was built to meet student's needs, rather than retrofitted from a previous use. This is the first time Gardner has constructed a purpose built elementary school since 1923 when Prospect Street School was constructed.



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We have begun work to improve and refurbish Landry Auditorium and LaChance Gymnasium at Gardner High School. Both have been fully repainted, the auditorium's seats were replaced, new carpet installed, and an acoustic improvement study is underway. The basketball court in the gym has been refinished and new scoreboards, crash pads, and banners installed.

The Watkins Field Renovation project will be completed this spring with new concession and bathroom facilities.

In addition to the Watkins Field facility improvements, the other fields at our education campus have been improved as well. This work included repairs to the irrigation system, leveling the field, reseeding the lawn, new baseball and softball diamonds, backstops, bullpens, tennis courts, and the construction of a new fitness court.

Two years ago, we reinstated our elementary school beginner band program after it was cut from the budget in 2010. In its first year, 158 students joined the program. Today, over 200 students are enrolled in the Gardner Elementary Band. To help boost all of our music programs across the district, we appropriated \$100,000 in funding to help purchase new equipment and supplies for all of our band, choral, drama, and general music programs in all our schools.

INFRASTRUCTURE

In the past two years, we have also made unprecedented investments in our infrastructure.

Since 2020, we've paved more miles of road than we have in that same timeframe in our City's history.

With that, we've replaced all water pipes that were originally installed between 1860 and 1930.

At the same time, utilizing Community Development Block Grant funds, we have continued improvements to our pedestrian infrastructure around the City. This has included installing new sidewalks, street crossings, lighting fixtures, and bicycle signage throughout the Downtown area.

Working with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation's Traffic Improvement Project program, the Uptown Rotary at the intersection of Woodland Avenue, Pearl, Elm, Green, and Central Streets will be completely remodeled this Spring in order to allow for more efficient traffic flow.



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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Our economic development measures have also proved to be successful as our commercial base continues to grow.

Many people in our community remember a time when our downtown was a lively place people frequented on a regular basis. In the 1930s, my great-grandfather, Alcide Goguen, opened his barbershop on the second floor of the Flatiron building at 25 Main Street, where he worked until he sold his business to Turk's Barbershop in 1973. While downtown faced economic challenges since then, we have taken tremendous steps to reinvigorate the area, supporting our long standing establishments and welcoming new endeavors to the City.

In the past two years, 35 businesses have either newly opened their doors in the City, expanded, or are under new ownership, with the majority of these businesses located in our Downtown.

Recognizing that we, as a City, needed to play a key role in our economic recovery efforts from the pandemic, not only to help these new businesses and property investments survive, but also assist our long standing local businesses, we created several economic assistance programs utilizing funding we received from the state and federal government.

Awarding over 3 quarters of a million dollars to help our new and existing businesses with things like rent and mortgage payments, utilities, and the unexpected costs that came with running a business during a pandemic. Our businesses showed faith in our community during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are returning the favor.

However, our economic development goals would be incomplete if we did not safeguard our future while moving forward from our past. Blight, vacant properties, and absentee landlords are problems that must be proactively guarded against. With that in mind, my office, working with Councilor Tyros, drafted an ordinance, unanimously approved by the Council, to arm our building and health departments with the tools they need to go after these problem properties that too often drag down a whole neighborhood.

THE STATE OF OUR CITY

Yes, the last few years were tough. The world has changed. Our city has changed. But with that comes change for the better. Working together, we transformed uncertainty into opportunity.



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Where other Cities around the country saw businesses close and storefronts boarded up, Gardner saw economic growth like it hasn't seen in decades.

While other Cities questioned how they would stay afloat financially, Gardner continued to cement our solid financial foundation.

While other Cities delayed projects, Gardner invested in our schools, improved our infrastructure, and increased our recreational opportunities.

Because of all of this, I am proud to stand here today, and report as clearly as I can, that the state of our City is strong.

FUTURE PLANS

We have many things to be proud of. But there is a lot more we are planning to do.

As we've worked to prevent problem properties, transform blight into promise and hold the private sector to a high standard, we will continue to hold ourselves to the same.

The opening of our new school gave us new opportunities in our former school buildings. Working with private sector partners, we have begun the process of revitalizing the areas of the former School Street School and Prospect Street School Buildings. Elm Street School, which hosts Gardner Academy, the Gardner Boys and Girls Club and will soon house the school department's central office.

In the coming months work will begin to transform the former Waterford Street School into the new Gardner Community Center to house the Gardner Senior Center, Gardner Community Action Committee, Growing Places' Food Processing Center to assist with food insecurity problems in the region, and GAAMHA community based adult day program. All four of these organizations have previously worked together, but by bringing them together all under one roof, they can grow and expand their services, work more closely and efficiently with each other, and better serve our residents. I would be remiss if I did not give a special thank you to Representative Zlotnik for his partnership in this endeavor - both in bringing these stakeholders together and for working to obtain a \$400,000 appropriation from the Legislature for this project.

Utilizing Community Development Block Grant Funding, the Greenwood Indoor Pool Building and the former Rome Furniture Building on the corner of Main Street and Willow Street are coming down.



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The construction of a new pavilion at the Greenwood Pool site and the work being done to transform the former National Grid site into a waterfront park will improve one of Gardner's most cherished recreational areas.

The work planned for Rear Main Street will break ground this spring. Utilizing over \$6 million from the Commonwealth's MassWorks Grant Program, this area with so much potential will soon have a new 160-space parking lot, event plaza, food truck parking, picnic area, amphitheater seating, fountain, shade pavilion, increased public art opportunities, and more.

All of which will compliment the new residential building that will be constructed on Rear Main Street- adding around 100 new market rate apartments.

Work will begin this spring to renovate the locations of Maki, Orpheum, and Chair City Parks to include outdoor seating options, fountains, historical information markers, and community gathering spaces.

Our five phase infrastructure improvement project will be entering its third phase this year with new lighting, sidewalks, and pedestrian safety improvements being made along the perimeter of Monument Park and Park Street to Crystal Lake Drive.

We have also begun studying the feasibility and merits of extending our infrastructure improvements to South Gardner Village Center, including a plan to move the overhead utility wires to underground conduits.

CLOSING

The work that we've done and the successes that we've achieved are entirely thanks to the teamwork that our officials at all levels have displayed. I would like to thank the members of our City Council, School Committee, our legislative delegation, and all our partners in government for constantly coming together to build a community we can be proud to call our home.

This is how government should work. Far too often, people view holding political office as theater, with their foremost responsibility clicks on social media, and their foremost motivator personal gain. However, that's not the case here. Regardless of how things are done elsewhere, when a problem in Gardner arises, we come together, find a solution, and do what needs to be done. To compete against our region, and others, both near and far in an ever increasing global economy, Gardner needs to be a well oiled machine.

CITY OF GARDNER



MASSACHUSETTS

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As we move into this new year, and the next century in our City's history, I look forward to us continuing to work together and setting an example for others to follow.

I'd like to leave you with the words that Mayor Pearson used to closed the City's first inaugural address 100 years ago:

"Let us resolve to lend our energies to make the City of Gardner a leader in the Commonwealth. Its advancement can be accomplished by holding true to high ideals, by keeping mutual faith and by a spirit of honest and intelligent citizenship."

God Bless you all, God Bless this great City, God Bless the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and God Bless America.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by Councilor George Tyros, and seconded by Councilor Aleksander Dernalowicz, it was voted viva voce, eight (8) yeas, President Elizabeth Kazinskas and Councilors James Boone, Ronald Cormier, Aleksander Dernalowicz, Karen Hardern, Dana Heath, Elizabeth Kazinskas, George Tyros, and James Walsh to adjourn at 7:25 p.m.

Accepted by the City Council: March 20, 2023