



# Gardner Community Development Plan

Putting It All Together

*"A central principle of good planning is to locate different land uses based on the physical, environmental, social, economic, and infrastructure characteristics of different sections of the community. In Gardner, this approach is especially relevant since the character of the City's landscape varies tremendously from an urban downtown to rural outlying areas."*



City of Gardner, Massachusetts

Prepared with assistance from:  
Daylor Consulting Group, Inc.  
Ten Forbes Road, Braintree, MA 02184



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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

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On January 21, 2000, Governor Paul Cellucci and Lieutenant Governor Jane Swift issued Executive Order 418 (EO 418), a measure designed to help communities plan for new housing opportunities while balancing economic development, transportation infrastructure improvements, and open space preservation. The impetus for EO 418 was the Governor's commitment to creating housing opportunities for families and individuals across a broad range of incomes.

EO 418 directed the Department of Housing and Community Development, the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, the Executive Office of Transportation and Construction, and the Department of Economic Development to provide technical assistance and \$30,000 in funding to each of the state's cities and towns for community planning. Specifically, EO 418 mandated that every community in Massachusetts create a Community Development Plan designed to address the following four issues/elements:

- **Housing** – Location, type, and quantity of new housing units including housing for individuals and families across a broad range of incomes;
- **Open Space and Resource Protection** – Location, type, and quantity of open space to be protected including identification and prioritization of environmentally critical unprotected open space, land critical to sustaining surface and groundwater quality and quantity, and environmental resources;
- **Economic Development** – Location, type, and quantity of commercial and industrial economic development; and
- **Transportation** – Location and description of any improvements to transportation, including matters of safety, access, congestion, transit, intermodal connections, and environmental considerations.

The EO 418 planning services and funds were made available to either: (1) update, enhance, or implement existing plans (for communities with plans in place); or (2) develop an understanding of housing, economic development, transportation, and the environment in relationship with one another (for communities with no plans in place). In addition, communities already engaged in a planning effort, were able to utilize the available services and funds to examine one or more of the elements in greater depth or to look at a regional or sub-regional issue with other communities.

EO 418 allowed communities to demonstrate that they had fulfilled the minimum requirements of the Executive Order through already existing plans. As mentioned previously, if a community was able to fulfill the mandate by submitting an already existing plan that community was then able to apply their funding allotment to implementation of an existing plan or to other activities. In some cases, the existing plan may have been deemed inadequate and additional work was required by the state in order to meet the requirements of EO 418.

Gardner had already engaged in a number of comprehensive planning efforts when EO 418 was issued. On October 29, 2002 the City submitted two studies completed prior to the issuance of EO 418. These



included the City's Open Space and Recreation Plan (2000) and the Housing Element of the Community Development Plan (2002). These documents addressed the EO 418 required planning elements for Open Space and Resource Protection and for Housing, respectively. Both plans received equivalency status, although the Housing Plan required enhancements, which have subsequently been submitted to the state.

The City of Gardner chose to utilize their funding to prepare the remaining planning elements required by EO 418: These elements included (1) the Economic Development Element of the Community Development Plan; (2) the Transportation Element of the Community Development Plan; and (3) the "Putting It All Together" summary mandated by the Commonwealth. Daylor Consulting Group, Inc. was retained to complete the Economic Development Element as well as the "Putting It All Together" summary. The Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) completed the transportation analysis.

The Transportation Element is not a comprehensive planning document. The Montachusett Regional Planning Commission prepares a detailed Regional Transportation Plan annually. This annual plan addresses roads, bridges, railroads and alternative modes like bicycles and pedestrians. Because a detailed transportation analysis was already available, the Massachusetts Highway Department identified a number of key transportation issues that could be addressed instead. After consultation with the City's Traffic Commission and Planning Board, two projects were selected. One was a traffic analysis of the intersections of Elm Street, Pearson Boulevard, Union Square, and Howe Street. The second was preparatory work that will assist with the adoption of an Official City Map under the provisions of MGL, Chapter 41.

## **1.1 Report Contents**

This document is intended to satisfy the "Putting It All Together" requirement of EO 418. Specifically it integrates the key points of the Housing, Economic Development, and Transportation elements, as well as the City's Open Space and Recreation Plan. This report is intended to be a concise summary of all the Elements that can be reviewed by members of the public as well as the city's boards and commissions. This document includes the following:

- A Community Development Plan narrative summarizing the rationale for the major recommendation shown on the "Putting It All Together" map. Individual descriptions of action items have not been provided for the Open Space Plan. Many of the action items outlined as part of the Open Space Plan have already been completed; therefore, the few remaining action items are only presented in the Implementation Matrix.
- An Implementation Matrix that summarizes the Plan's major recommendations in tabular format and indicates the time frames for implementing each recommendation and the group or groups within the city who are responsible for implementing each recommendation.
- A "Putting It All Together" map that illustrates the location, type, and quantity (if appropriate) of uses proposed in all four elements of the Community Development Plan, including housing, business development, and protected open space.



## 2.0 HOUSING ACTION PLAN

### 2.1 Narrative Summary

A central principle of good planning is to locate different land uses based on the physical, environmental, social, economic, and infrastructure characteristics of different sections of the community. In Gardner, this approach is especially relevant since the character of the City’s landscape varies tremendously from an urban downtown to rural outlying areas. For example, land in the downtown core and nearby residential neighborhoods is generally served by public water and sewer lines and has good transportation access including public transportation and access to Route 2. Schools, stores, services, and employment opportunities are all within walking distance. In contrast, the rural areas generally lack public water, sewer, and road infrastructure, with the exception of the state highways, is generally incapable of accommodating large volumes of traffic or high travel speeds. These areas lack public transportation, and driving is often the only way to access schools, stores, and employment opportunities. Portions of rural Gardner are also especially environmentally sensitive, such as the lands that recharge the City’s reservoir and groundwater well.

Based on these considerations, a major focus of the Housing Action Plan is to promote a variety of new housing in and near the downtown area while limiting new housing development in the rural sections of the City. Because most of the areas in and near downtown are already developed, new housing here will consist of “infill” development. Infill includes developing vacant lots, redeveloping vacant or substandard buildings, or increasing the size or amount of development on a particular parcel—if it is compatible with the neighborhood context. While some development will inevitably occur in the rural sections of the community, the City should limit both the extent and impact of such development through density and design controls. Specific policies to meet these objectives are detailed below. In order to implement most of these policies, the City will need to re-write its Zoning Ordinance and also modify its Rules and Regulations Governing the Subdivision of Land. **Revising the Zoning Ordinance should be a top priority for Gardner.**

See **Figure 1** and **Figure 2**, the “Putting It All Together” Maps, for a visual depiction of the areas proposed for housing and summary of housing creation targets over the next ten years.

### 2.2 Implementation Matrix

Housing Implementation Plan					
Item #	Description	Responsibility	Importance	Time Frame	Notes
<b>HOUSING POLICY 1A: Establish policies to manage residential growth. Specifically to manage the amount of development.</b>					
H1A-1	Increase minimum lot size	Planning Board	Medium	Short-Term	RR2 only



## Housing Implementation Plan

Item #	Description	Responsibility	Importance	Time Frame	Notes
H1A-2	Create larger lots with reduced frontage	Planning Board	Medium	Short-Term	–
H1A-3	Enact a sewer ordinance	City Council	Medium	Medium	–
<b>HOUSING POLICY 1B: Establish policies to manage residential growth. Specifically to manage the rate of development.</b>					
H1B-1	Modify the Scheduled Development Ordinance	Planning Board	High	Short-Term	Completed
<b>HOUSING POLICY 1C: Establish policies to manage residential growth. Specifically to manage the style of development.</b>					
H1C-1	Revise the Cluster Development Ordinance	Planning Board	High	Short-Term	–
H1C-2	Promote subdivisions that are in keeping with their neighborhood.	Planning Board	High	Short-Term	–
H1C-2	Require ANR Plans to document site features.	Planning Board	High	Short-Term	–
H1C-3	Allow common driveways.	Planning Board	High	Short-Term	–
H1C-4	Adopt a Scenic Roads Ordinance	City Council	Medium	Medium	Proposed Ordinance submitted to City Council
H1C-5	Adopt A Scenic Overlay District	Planning Board	Medium	Medium	–
<b>HOUSING POLICY 2: Meet the housing needs of Gardner's population.</b>					
H2-1	Allow the development of senior housing.	Planning Board	High	Short-Term	–
H2-2	Encourage the development of duplexes	Planning Board	High	Short-Term	SFR 1 only





## Housing Implementation Plan

Item #	Description	Responsibility	Importance	Time Frame	Notes
H2-3	Allow more flexibility in developing accessory units	Planning Board	High	Short-Term	–
H2-4	Continue to promote the redevelopment of historic mill buildings	DCDP/GRA	High	Ongoing	–
H2-5	Adopt Inclusionary Housing provisions	Planning Board	High	Short-Term	–
H2-6	Facilitate the redevelopment of vacant lots and abandoned buildings in and near downtown	DCDP/GRA	High	Ongoing	–
H2-7	Rehabilitate existing housing units	DCDP	High	Ongoing	–
H2-8	Reduce parking requirements for multi-family housing projects located in the GR-III and C-I districts.	Planning Board	High	Short-term	–

### 2.3 Description of Action Items

#### 2.3.1 *Managing Residential Growth*

During the public process, residents and City officials expressed serious concerns about residential growth in Gardner and the impact that this growth is having on open space, schools, and services. Accordingly, the City should adopt a residential growth management strategy that addresses the three key aspects of growth: (1) The amount of development that can occur; (2) The rate at which development can occur; and (3) The style of development that the City allows or encourages. This section recommends strategies for addressing each of these three issues.



**HOUSING POLICY 1A: Establish policies to manage residential growth. Policies specifically designed to manage the amount of development.**

**ACTION STEPS:**

**H1A-1. Increase Minimum Lot Size:** The City should increase the minimum residential lot size in unsewered portions of the Rural Residential II district from 60,000 square feet to 80,000 square feet. However, this change should only be made in conjunction with modifications to the Cluster Development ordinance that provide a density bonus for clustering new residential development.

**H1A-2. Create Larger Lots with Reduced Frontage:** To provide an alternative to new subdivision roads, the City should consider establishing provisions for estate lots, otherwise known as “flag lots” or “pork chop lots.” This provision would allow building on a lot with less than the ordinarily required frontage, provided that the lot is larger and the dwelling is set far back from the road.

**H1A-3. Enact a Sewer Ordinance:** The City should enact a sewer ordinance that establishes a defined sewer service area for existing and desired future sewer lines. Sewer extensions outside this defined area would then be prohibited unless the applicant obtained a map change to the sewer service area map based on sound planning and/or engineering rationale.

**HOUSING POLICY 1B: Establish policies to manage residential growth. Policies specifically designed to manage the amount of development.**

**ACTION STEPS:**

**H1B-1. Modify the Scheduled Development Ordinance:** The City should modify the Scheduled Development Ordinance as follows:

- Reduce the threshold for triggering the ordinance from 250 units in a two-year period to 100 units in a two-year period. This number is based on the average number of single-family housing permits issued over the past seven years (43 per year).
- Apply the phasing requirement to smaller developments—e.g., any project 10 units or larger.
- Reduce the rate at which a development may be built once the Scheduled Development Ordinance is triggered. For example, a limit of eight units or 35% of the total units (whichever is greater) in the first two years, then six units or 25% of the total units (whichever is greater) in each subsequent year may be more appropriate.
- In order to encourage infill development in and near the downtown, the City could exempt projects in the GR-III and C-I districts from the phasing requirement. The rationale for this policy is that these areas already have in place most of the infrastructure and services necessary to accommodate new development, whereas providing such infrastructure and services to outlying areas entails a higher marginal cost for the City.



**HOUSING POLICY 1C: Establish policies to manage residential growth. Policies specifically designed to manage the style of development.**

**ACTION STEPS:**

**H1C-1. Modify the Cluster Development Ordinance:** In order to encourage good cluster developments in the City, two sets of changes to the ordinance are needed. First, developers need more incentive to build a cluster rather than a conventional subdivision, especially since cluster developments require a special permit whereas conventional subdivisions are allowed by right. Second, the dimensional and density standards should be altered to obtain an optimal mix of well-designed development and maximum open space land.

**H1C-2. Promote Appropriate Subdivisions:** The Planning Board should promote subdivision designs that are in keeping with their context. In many cases, this will mean a more rural appearance, with careful attention paid to environmental and aesthetic features. See **Box 4-3** for suggested practices, which can be achieved either by modifying the Rules and Regulations Governing the Subdivision of Land or by granting waivers depending on the circumstances of individual projects.

**H1C-3. Approval Not Required Submission Requirements:** The City should require Approval Not Required (ANR) plans to show the location of wetlands as well as slope contours.

**H1C-4. Commons Driveways:** The City's Subdivision Rules and Regulations currently prohibit the use of common driveways. However, this provision should be eliminated and the City should include a common driveways provision in the Subdivision Rules and Regulations and/or Zoning Ordinance that specifies standards for common driveways as well as the maximum number of lots that may be served by a common driveway.

**H1C-5. Scenic Roads Ordinance:** There are no regulations or ordinances on the books to protect the City's scenic resources. New development, if not sensitively designed and sited, could spoil these scenic resources. Accordingly, the City should adopt a Scenic Roads Ordinance pursuant to Chapter 40, Section 15C of the Massachusetts General Laws

**H1C-6. Scenic Overlay District:** While the Scenic Roads Ordinance is an important tool, it only applies to work within the right-of-way of scenic roads. However, clearing and development outside of the right-of-way can have a significant effect on the character of scenic roads. A more aggressive tool for addressing these impacts is a Scenic Overlay District that provides additional design and development guidelines for projects in scenic areas. As an overlay district, the Scenic designation would be superimposed over the base districts and provide additional protection measures in scenic areas. The underlying uses would remain unchanged. A Scenic Overlay District could include the following scenic lands in Gardner:

- **Areas Within 300 Feet of a Scenic Road:** These lands are visible from scenic roads and development within this 300-foot band greatly affects the character of the road.
- **Prominent Ridgelines:** Any high points in the City that are visible from numerous locations. These could be defined based on elevation.



- **Steep Slopes:** Sheer faces of steep hillsides (exceeding 25% slope) are also very visible. People’s attention is often drawn to areas with large elevation changes, making these locations particularly important to the City’s scenic character.

Within the Scenic Overlay District, a combination of incentives, regulations, and development reviews are suggested to create new development that blends naturally into the City’s landscape. These policies could be incorporated into a new Scenic District Ordinance. In terms of incentives, landowners and developers should be given additional options for siting driveways and curb cuts to improve access while minimizing visual impact (see above). Regulations in the Scenic Overlay District should include greater residential building setbacks (e.g., 150 feet) and a requirement to retain at least 50 feet of natural vegetation along the roadside. In addition, the City should review new development in the Scenic Overlay District to minimize its visual impact. For example, if an old farm field is being developed, new houses that are recessed into the treeline at the edge of the field will be much less visually obtrusive than houses positioned in the middle of the field.

### **2.3.2 Meeting the Housing Needs of Gardner’s Residents**

Gardner currently has a relatively balanced housing stock, with about half of the units consisting of single-family dwellings and the other half consisting of multi-family units ranging from duplexes to apartment buildings. Many of these units are affordable and/or meet the needs of the elderly. Providing an appropriate mix of housing for Gardner’s future is mainly a matter of maintaining the balance that now exists in the City. To do this, however, will require modifying the City’s zoning ordinance—which, over the past decade, has produced almost exclusively single-family housing.

At the same time, housing goals must be balanced against growth management goals. The latter set of goals dictates that, to the extent that zoning changes will *increase* the amount of development allowed in the City, this development should be located mainly in and near the downtown. Specific policies for creating an appropriate mix of housing types, including affordable housing, are outlined below.

#### **HOUSING POLICY 1A: Meet the housing needs of Gardner’s population.**

#### **ACTION STEPS:**

#### **Mix of Housing Types and Affordable Housing**

**H2-1 Independent and Assisted Senior Housing:** The city should allow more opportunities to develop affordable and market rate senior housing, especially assisted living facilities. In consideration of its lower impacts, senior housing and assisted living facilities should be defined as separate uses in the Zoning Ordinance definitions and Use Regulations table. Both uses should be allowed in the GR-III and C-I districts, subject to Site Plan Review, and allowed by special permit in the SFR-I and RR-II districts, also subject to Site Plan Review. In addition, a “Senior Housing and Assisted Living” section should be added to the Zoning Ordinance that defines density and design controls for these uses. Design guidelines could differ depending on the district where the proposal is sited.





**H2-2 Duplexes:** The City should allow duplexes in the SFR-I district by special permit and consider reducing the additional lot area required from 50% to 30%. Because the SFR zones vary in character—some areas have numerous 2-family and even 3-family structures while others are entirely single-family—one of the criteria for granting the special permit for a duplex in the SFR district should be the existing neighborhood context. These provisions will provide more flexibility to build duplexes in a compatible manner in and near downtown, which will promote small-scale infill development.

**H2-3 Accessory Dwelling Units:** Accessory apartments should be allowed by special permit in all single-family structures, not just those that existed prior to the effective date of the Zoning Ordinance. Second, the City should consider allowing as a special permit use the renovation of an existing accessory building (existing as of the effective date of the provision) into an additional residential structure, as long as the proposed additional dwelling unit is located entirely within the envelope of the existing accessory building. The owner of the lot would need to certify that the accessory unit may not be subdivided into a separate lot at any time in the future.

**H2-4 Mill Building Redevelopment:** The City should continue to promote the redevelopment of historic mill buildings through efforts such as the Rear Main Street project, identifying possible funding sources for redevelopment, and working cooperatively with private developers. Multi-family rental or condominium housing is an appropriate use for such buildings, except where environmental contamination precludes a housing use.

**H2-5 Inclusionary Housing:** One of the City’s housing goals is to maintain the affordability of the local housing stock. Since very few market rate units currently being built are affordable, the City should consider adopting an Inclusionary Housing policy requiring some minimum percentage (e.g., 10%) of the units in any multi-family development (5 units or larger, including senior housing) to be affordable.

**H2-5 Vacant Lots and Abandoned Buildings:** The city should facilitate the redevelopment of vacant lots and abandoned buildings in and near downtown through two policies. First, the City should focus its resources on expediting the process for taking control of tax title properties that could be used for housing or economic development and that do not contain significant liabilities. Recent state legislation (i.e., *An Act Returning Tax Title Properties to Productive Use*, 2002) can help the City in this endeavor, but the most pressing need is simply to make tax title properties a priority within City government and dedicate the needed staff resources to these issues.

Second, there are some vacant lots in Gardner that cannot be redeveloped because they do not conform to the City’s current dimensional standards. State grandfathering provisions do not apply because the lots were previously developed. For these properties, the Zoning Board of Appeals, when considering variance applications, should take into consideration the potential benefit of redevelopment to the neighborhood and the City’s housing stock.



**H2-6 Rehabilitate Existing Housing:** The City has a successful ongoing Housing Rehabilitation Program that is funded through HUD and administered by the Department of Community Development and Planning. Under this program, about 12-15 housing units are rehabbed each year. The City should continue this program and pursue additional state and federal funding to rehabilitate public and private housing in substandard condition.

**H2-7 Reduce Parking Requirements:** The Zoning Ordinance should allow the Planning Board to entertain requests to reduce the parking regulations for housing projects (both new development and redevelopment) in the GR-III and C-I districts. Waiver requests should be considered based on the merits of the project, the actual projected parking demand based on the demographics of the expected inhabitants, and the potential to use shared parking or on-street parking to satisfy some of the demand.



### 3.0 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN

#### 3.1 Narrative Summary

The City’s diverse economy is an important part of the community’s character and self-image: Gardner is not just a bedroom community but also a place where people, make products, practice a wide variety of professions, and come to shop and relax. Over the past decade, Gardner has experienced positive economic growth compared to the region. Gardner has been able to benefit from the positive economic growth experienced throughout the late 1990s. Some of the features that have allowed Gardner to remain economically viable include: (1) competitively prices industrial and residential property; (2) access to a skilled labor force; and (3) a high quality of life.

Gardner’s economic development goals favor continued job growth as well as the expansion of the business tax base. However, the City does not want to promote business growth at the expense of its natural resources and community character. Accordingly, the Economic Development Action Plan focuses not only on attracting appropriate business development, but also on making sure that this development is compatible with these important City values. The Plan recommends making the best possible use of existing industrial and commercial properties areas as well as rezoning additional land for industrial and commercial business uses.

The strategies contained in the City’s Economic Development Plan are divided into four major program areas. These four major program areas are defined as Sustaining Economic Growth, Reinvesting in Gardner, Improving Community Life, and Regional Collaboration. These program areas provide the Plan’s major organizing framework. Within each of the four program areas is a list of specific actions that the City can follow to achieve the overall objectives related to the program area.

See **Figure 1** and **Figure 2**, the “Putting It All Together” Maps, for a visual depiction of the areas proposed for housing and summary of housing creation targets over the next ten years.

#### 3.2 Implementation Matrix

Economic Development Implementation Plan					
Item #	Description	Responsibility	Importance	Time Frame	Notes
<b>Economic Development Policy 1A: Diversify Gardner’s economy and increase local employment by encouraging and facilitating retention and expansion of Gardner’s businesses.</b>					
E1A-1	Assist in the formation of business relationships	GRA	Medium	Medium	–
E1A-2	Expand the Chamber Visitation Program	Chamber/GRA	Medium	Medium	–



## Economic Development Implementation Plan

Item #	Description	Responsibility	Importance	Time Frame	Notes
<b>Economic Development Policy 1B: Diversify Gardner’s economy and increase local employment by encouraging and facilitating the attraction of new businesses to Gardner.</b>					
E1B-1	Expand broker development efforts	GRA	Medium	Medium	–
E1B-2	Conduct staff outreach	DCDP/GRA	High	Medium	–
E1B-3	Create a local business incubator	GRA/CDC	Medium	Long-Term	–
E1B-4	Develop a new web site	GRA	High	Short-Term	–
<b>Economic Development Policy 2A: Reinvest in Gardner’s older industrial and commercial properties by conducting strategic planning efforts.</b>					
E2A-1	Create an Industrial Redevelopment Project Area	GRA	High	Medium	–
E2A-2	Continue Rear Main Street revitalization efforts	DCDP/GRA	High	Ongoing	–
E2A-3	Rezone additional land for commercial and industrial development	PB	High	Short-Term	–
<b>Economic Development Policy 2B: Reinvest in Gardner’s older industrial and commercial properties by offering development incentives.</b>					
E2B-1	Continue the Grow Gardner Fund	GRA	High	Ongoing	–
E2B-2	Explore DHCD’s new District Improvement Financing Program.	DCDP	Medium	Short-Term	–





## Economic Development Implementation Plan

Item #	Description	Responsibility	Importance	Time Frame	Notes
<b>Economic Development Policy 2C: Reinvest in Gardner’s older industrial and commercial properties by creating unique development opportunities.</b>					
E2C-1	Expand the “Troubled Properties” list	DCDP	High	Medium	–
<b>Economic Development Policy 3A: Improve life in Gardner by enhancing community amenities.</b>					
E3A-1	Encourage the use of vacant space.	Square Two	High	Medium	–
E3A-2	Advocate for attraction of appropriate downtown tenants	Square Two	High	Medium	–
E3A-3	Continue to utilize CDBG funds to assist with renovations of downtown businesses and areas in need of reinvestment	DCDP	High	Ongoing	–
<b>Economic Development Policy 3B: Improve life in Gardner by promoting a positive community image.</b>					
E3B-1	Encourage positive media coverage	DCDP/GRA	High	Short-Term	–
E3B-2	Building a positive image of residential life	DCDP	High	Short-Term	–
E3B-3	Continue and expand special events and promotions	Chamber/ Square Two	High	Ongoing	–
<b>Economic Development Policy 4: Encourage regional collaboration.</b>					
E4-1	Work with neighboring communities to identify sectors for expansion	DCDP	High	Medium	Northern Tier Project



## Economic Development Implementation Plan

Item #	Description	Responsibility	Importance	Time Frame	Notes
E4-2	Compile information regarding regional business assistance programs	DCDP/GRA	High	Medium	–

### 3.3 Description of Action Items

#### 3.3.1 Sustaining Economic Growth

The objectives of this program area are to diversify Gardner’s economy and increase local employment by encouraging and facilitating the retention and expansion of existing businesses, and the attraction of new businesses to the City. Through this process, the City will seek to maintain a broad-based economy that provides a wide range of employment opportunities and at the same time expands the local revenue base to better finance services for businesses and residents.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY 1A: Diversify Gardner’s economy and increase local employment by encouraging and facilitating retention and expansion of Gardner’s businesses.**

#### **ACTION STEPS:**

**E1A-1. Business Relationships:** In order to facilitate the development of linkages between local businesses the City could work to build awareness of the types of products and services that local companies can provide to producer companies. This could include sponsoring a local services and supplier’s expo in conjunction with Chamber of Commerce, which would attract potential customers. The City could also work with the Chamber to include information in its directory that would help members identify purchasing or sales opportunities with other local companies. Finally, similar information could also be incorporated into a joint City of Gardner/ Gardner Redevelopment Agency web site, if implemented (see **E1B-4**).

**E1A-2 Chamber of Commerce Business Visitation Program:** The Chamber of Commerce should expand its business visitation program, which involves representatives of the Chamber of Commerce visiting several businesses per year to learn about their operations, discuss potential problems, and identify concerns that the Chamber could address. In determining its future businesses for visitation, the Chamber should seek to target manufacturing businesses. The City could help to identify these businesses.



**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY 1B: Diversify Gardner’s economy and increase local employment by encouraging and facilitating the attraction of new businesses to Gardner.**

**ACTION STEPS:**

**E1B-1 Continue and Expand Broker Development Efforts:** Economic development staff currently maintain contact with numerous real estate brokers active in the Gardner area in order to exchange information on available sites and prospective tenants. This program should be expanded to include conducting outreach to real estate brokers and site locators that may not focus on Gardner in particular, but have contact with clients seeking locations in the region.

**E1B-2 Staff Outreach:** Currently, City staff conduct outreach to businesses which have made inquiries regarding locating in the City of Gardner. This program informally provides prospective businesses with a point of contact regarding locating in the City. City staff responds to inquiries on a case-by-case basis, depending on the nature of the information requested. This program should be formalized and a clear structure for conducting outreach put into place. In addition to conducting outreach to businesses which are already established elsewhere, City staff should also consider conducting outreach to entrepreneurs who are considering starting new businesses.

**E1B-3 Local Business Incubator:** Much of Gardner’s notable economic development activity has involved relocation of existing businesses to Gardner. Small business start-ups are a less visible component of local economic development; however, they can play an important role as a means for employees of local companies to spin off their own businesses, or for the City to attract entrepreneurs from other areas and help to nurture their growth in the local economy.

A small business incubator is a facility that is designed to provide start-up businesses with an opportunity to become established in an environment which can offer the benefits of reduced rents, on-site technical assistance, shared services, small spaces, or favorable terms. Such a facility can reduce the barriers to small business formation, and provide resources necessary to promote long-term success. Ultimately, the goal of small business incubators is to “graduate” their tenants into larger spaces where they will become self-sufficient. The City might consider developing an incubator as one tool to use in attracting new businesses that would strengthen an existing industry cluster or form the core of a new cluster.

**E1B-4 Joint City of Gardner/Redevelopment Authority World Wide Web Site:** The City should explore the possibility of establishing a World Wide Web site in cooperation with the Redevelopment Authority. A web site can function as an information kiosk for the City of Gardner, accessible from any location at any time by users with Internet access. The use of the Internet as an economic development tool is moving into the mainstream, as indicated by the increasing numbers of local jurisdictions and economic development organizations developing web sites.



### **3.3.2 Reinvesting In Gardner**

The City of Gardner is for the most part “built out” in terms of commercial and industrial development (i.e., there is not a lot of vacant or open land available for industrial or commercial development). As a result, if the City is to continue to evolve to meet the changing demands of the marketplace, it must find creative ways to use the buildings and land resources that are available to support economic development. The actions contained in this strategy focus on the need to recycle existing commercial and industrial properties that are no longer functional in order to adapt the Gardner real estate market to changing economic forces that may demand new or different types of buildings. Although the need for rezoning land for commercial and industrial use is discussed later in this chapter, the existing inventory of older and available commercial and industrial properties available in Gardner should not be ignored and the need for newly zoned land should be balanced with the reuse of existing properties.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY 2A: Reinvest in Gardner’s older industrial and commercial properties by conducting strategic planning efforts.**

#### **ACTION STEPS:**

**E2A-1 Industrial District Redevelopment Project Area:** The City should consider designating a survey area to study the feasibility of creating a new Redevelopment Project Area in Downtown Gardner, which will be very helpful in encouraging the reuse and redevelopment of many of Gardner’s “white elephant” industrial buildings. Staff should consider forming a citizen’s advisory committee of local stakeholders to review and affirm the view that Redevelopment will be an important and effective tool in encouraging the reuse of existing underutilized properties and the development of vacant properties within the area. In conjunction with forming the study committee, the City should also consider several other tools that can be used to collect information on specialized redevelopment issues in the study area, including the role of hazardous substances as a barrier to redevelopment, and mechanisms that the City can establish in order to help property owners address this problem.

**E2A-2 Rear Main Street Revitalization:** The Rear Main Street Corridor Plan and Revitalization Strategy was initiated by the City, working cooperatively with the City’s Downtown Business Association, and private landowners, to shape a plan that identified concrete actions needed to support the revitalization of the Rear Main Street Corridor. The study was undertaken by Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. and RKG Associates on behalf of the City’s Planning and Community Development Department and completed in 1998.

Many of the strategies outlined in the plan have already been completed. The town should continue to follow through with the recommendations outlined in the plan to improve access to the Corridor and encourage reuse of the properties located along it.

The Rear Main Street Area should be part of the Industrial District Redevelopment Project Area discussed above.





**E2A-3 Strategy 11 – Rezone Additional Land For Commercial and Industrial Development:** As mentioned previously, there is not a lot of vacant or open land available for industrial or commercial development. Although, the majority of the strategies outlined in this document encourage the reuse of existing commercial and industrial buildings these strategies should be balanced with NEW commercial and industrial development, which is currently constrained. The City should undertake a comprehensive rezoning of the town in order to provided additional land appropriate for neighborhood serving retail uses as well as commercial and industrial uses. In addition, the City should consider modifying existing regulations to help create a business friendly environment. Some of the items to be considered include the following: (1) a review and update of zoning bylaw definitions; (2) a review and update of permitted business, industrial, and accessory uses; (3) a review and enhancement of the Development Overlay District provisions in order to better facilitate adaptive reuse. Expansion of the provision to apply to more areas should be considered; (4) a review of commercial and industrial schedules for lot areas, yards, and height requirements; (5) a review and update of apartment and condominium regulations; (6) a review and update of Gardner’s parking standards; (7) a comprehensive review of the city’s Site Plan Regulations; and (8) a review of the requirements for a development impact statement and standards.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY 2B: Reinvest in Gardner’s older industrial and commercial properties by conducting strategic planning efforts.**

**ACTION STEPS:**

**E2B-1- Continue Business Loan Program:** Gardner Redevelopment Agency established the Grow Gardner Fund, which provides small business owners already located in Gardner or businesses seeking to relocate to Gardner the opportunity to borrow funds to assist with their expansion or relocation efforts.

**E2B-2 Explore DHCD’s new District Improvement Financing Program:** DHCD has established a new financing program that allows communities to utilize Tax Increment Financing without establishing an Urban Renewal Area. The City of Gardner needs to explore how to best utilize this program.



**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY 2C: Reinvest in Gardner’s older industrial and commercial properties by conducting strategic planning efforts.**

**ACTION STEPS:**

**E2C-1 Troubled Properties List:** The City should expand its troubled property list and maintain a comprehensive database regarding development opportunity sites in Gardner that can be used to assist potential developers/users identify possible locations. This database should include information regarding the quantity, type, and condition of existing improvements. Sites to be included in the database should be major properties within the City where redevelopment would be desirable. These sites could include vacant and/or underutilized buildings, vacant lots, and/or sites currently occupied by a use that is no longer consistent with the Community Development Plan or other long-range visions for Gardner’s future.

**3.3.3 Improving Community Life**

The primary objective of this strategy area is to maintain and improve the quality of community life in Gardner in order to provide the type of environment in which local economic activities can thrive. A specific subset of program actions below deals with improving community amenities and promoting a positive community image.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY 3A: Improve life in Gardner by enhancing community amenities.**

**ACTION STEPS:**

**E3A-1 Encourage Use of Vacant Space and Attract Appropriate Downtown Tenants:**

**E3A -2** The City should advocate for the attraction of tenants that would reinforce the vision of Downtown Gardner as a location for community-serving retail. The types of businesses that would be appropriate could include restaurants, specialty foods, personal and business services, and various types of specialty retailers not likely to be attracted to other Gardner locations. In addition, entertainment land uses can provide attractions for residents living throughout Gardner and neighboring communities, while helping to define the downtown’s function as a community focal point.

In addition, the City has established a program designed to assist local business owners with the renovation of downtown commercial properties. By providing assistance to small business owners and property owners, the City encourages the maintenance, upkeep, and upgrading of downtown properties. This helps to create a more attractive shopping environment. The City may wish to consider targeting marketing efforts for these programs or earmarking a portion of program funds specifically for certain areas of downtown in order to create a visible impact in the area.



**E3A-3 Community Development Block Grant Public Improvements Program:** Through this program, the City would allocate a portion of its annual Community Development Block Grant (CBDG) funding to pay for improvements in areas that are in need of public investment. For example, the CDBG program could provide funding for the building renovation program.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY 3B: Improve life in Gardner by promoting a positive community image.**

**ACTION STEPS:**

- E3B-1 Encourage Positive Media Coverage:** Image and perception have a great influence on
- E3B-2** communities' ability to attract and retain desirable economic activities. The purpose of this
- E3B-3** program is to promote Gardner's assets to both businesses and residents who are located within the region. Primary components of this program should include positive media coverage, residential image-building, and special events/promotions.

**3.3.4 Regional Strategies**

In addition to the aforementioned strategy areas there a number of action items that if completed could not only benefit Gardner but the entire region. In addition, these activities are labor intensive and generally a City such as Gardner does not have the technical and/or financial resources to complete the items on its own. Nevertheless, the completion of the action items listed below warrants attention

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY 4: Encourage Regional Collaboration**

**ACTION STEPS:**

- E4-1 Strategy 18 - Additional Study of Sectors for Attraction:** This action involves further exploration of the business sectors to be targeted for business attraction. There is a need at this time to look to the future, beyond the types of businesses that have been expanding in Gardner and the region during the past ten years, and identify the types of emerging industries that might find Gardner and the region a compatible location in the coming years
- E4-2 Strategy 19 - Develop Directory of Small Business Assistance Services:** This task would involve compiling information regarding the types of business assistance programs available to local businesses, and should include not only programs offered by the City of Gardner, but also programs available to local businesses through regional, state, or federal programs.



## 4.0 TRANSPORTATION ACTION PLAN

### 4.1 Narrative Summary

As part of the Executive Order 418 Program, the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) prepared a scope of work for the City of Gardner that included two separate studies: an intersection deficiency investigation and analysis; and a review and update of an Official City Map and its adoption. The results of the intersection deficiency analysis and related action items are presented below

The focus of the intersection deficiency investigation and analysis was the following intersections: Elm Street and Union Square/Pearson Boulevard, Elm Street and Howe Street, Union Square and Howe Street. The emphasis of this investigation was on the delay vehicles experience moving through the intersections, especially from the minor approaches from Union Square onto Elm Street and Howe Street onto Elm Street, and safety. This investigation includes an assessment of the existing conditions, an assessment of the traffic circulation flow through the intersections, capacity analyses, and provides recommendations for roadway improvements, which are presented below.

See **Figure 1** and **Figure 2**, the “Putting It All Together” Maps, for a visual depiction of the areas proposed for housing and summary of housing creation targets over the next ten years.

### 4.2 Implementation Matrix

Transportation Implementation Plan					
Item #	Description	Responsibility	Importance	Time Frame	Notes
<b>Transportation Policy 1: Improve the intersection of Elm Street, Pearson Boulevard, Union Square, and Howe Street</b>					
T1-1	Install stop signs at the intersections of Elm Street/Howe Street and Union Square Howe Street	DPW	High	Short-Term	–
T1-2	Evaluate pavement conditions	DPW	High	Short-Term	–
T1-3	Repaint pavement markings	DPW	High	Short-Term	–
T1-4	Construct proper curb cuts	DPW	High	Medium	–
T1-5	Upgrade the existing signal	DPW	High	Medium	–



Transportation Implementation Plan					
Item #	Description	Responsibility	Importance	Time Frame	Notes
T1-6	Install Advance Warning signs	DPW	High	Medium	-

### 4.3 Description of Action Items

#### 4.3.1 Intersection Improvements

Although the intersections in the Study Area allow traffic to operate in a safe and acceptable manner, there are several improvements that the City of Gardner may decide to undertake that would enhance traffic safety and road conditions in the area. Public safety is particularly critical near the gas pump island located at the service station.

**TRANSPORTATION POLICY 1: Improve the intersection of Elm Street, Pearson Boulevard, Union Square, and Howe Street.**

#### ACTION STEPS:

**T1-1 Install stop signs at the intersections of Elm Street/Howe Street and Union Square/Howe Street:** A review of the *MUTCD* guidance for the installation of a stop sign states: STOP signs should not be used unless engineering judgment indicates that one or more of the following conditions exist:

- Intersection of a less important road with a main road where application of the normal right-of-way rule would not be expected to provide reasonably safe operation.
- Street entering a through highway or street.
- Unsignalized intersection in a signalized area.
- High speeds, restricted view, or crash records indicate a need for control by the STOP sign.

The close proximity of these two intersections, Elm Street/Howe Street and Union Square/Howe Street to the signalized Elm & Union Square/Pearson Boulevard intersection would meet condition C - Unsignalized intersections in a signalized area. Additionally, condition A would appear to also exist. The Union Square and Elm Street approaches to Howe Street are such that safety concerns related to sight distances and speeds would be of concern.

**T1-2 Pavement Conditions:** Pavement conditions need to be evaluated and pavement needs to be either repaired or rehabilitated. The pavement condition most likely ranges from good (significant distress - treatable with sealing and patching) to fair (moderate distress - the pavement is deteriorating rapidly).



- T1-3 Pavement Markings:** Pavement markings need to be repainted. This includes road center lines, edge lines, crosswalks, stop lines, storage lane markings for the through lane group and the right turn arrows on the right turn lane on Pearson Boulevard.
- T1-4 Curb Cuts:** Proper curbs and curb cuts should be constructed on both sides of Howe Street and the north side of Union Square from the Elm Street & Union Square/Pearson Boulevard intersection to just beyond the proposed stop sign. This would improve vehicle guidance and movement through the area by clearly defining street limits.
- T1-5 Upgrading of existing signal:** Although the signal operates at an acceptable LOS, upgrading and improving the signal to a fully actuated signal from its current pre-timed operation would improve the flow through the crossing as well as reducing vehicle delays. In addition to upgrading of the signal hardware and phasing, pedestrian crossing signals and actuated phases should be installed. The commercial activity around the signal and the crosswalks at the intersection direct pedestrians through the crossing. As such, proper measures to direct the vehicles and the pedestrians as to the safest locations and times to cross the various roads are necessary. Separate crossing signal heads and phases would help to clearly define these locations as well as to call driver attention to potential pedestrians in the area. Upgrading the signal should be eligible for state assistance.
- T1-6 Installation of Advanced Warning signs on all approaches:** These signs should provide positive guidance to the driver as to the approaching signal as well as a clear indication of lane usage. Signs should conform to *MUTCD* recommended placement and design. Refer to Chapters 2B – Regulatory Signs and 2C – Warning Signs of the *MUTCD*.





## 5.0 OPEN SPACE ACTION PLAN

### 5.1 Narrative Summary

Within the context of accelerating regional growth, the City of Gardner prepared an update of its 1995 - 1999 Open Space and Recreation Plan to assess the current status of its natural resources, and to propose a strategy to preserve and enhance these resources over a five year period. Many of the action items outlined in the Open Space and Recreation Plan have been implemented and the City plans to update the document shortly. As a result this section presents only those action items that have not been completed.

See **Figure 1** and **Figure 2**, the “Putting It All Together” Maps, for a visual depiction of the areas proposed for housing and summary of housing creation targets over the next ten years.

### 5.2 Implementation Matrix

Open Space Implementation Plan					
Item #	Description	Responsibility	Importance	Time Frame	Notes
<b>Open Space Policy 1: Protect Gardner’s natural resources.</b>					
O1-1	Work with Winchendon and Templeton to develop inter-municipal agreements aimed at protecting watershed and open space along town boundaries	DCDP	High	Medium	–
O1-2	Increase the municipal budget for maintenance of parks and playgrounds as well as the management of streams, channel banks, culverts, dams, dikes, and control structures	City Council	High	Medium	–
O1-3	Adopt a Reduced Salt Ordinance	City Council	Medium	Medium	–
O1-4	Adopt a Scenic Roads Ordinance	City Council	Medium	Medium	Proposed Ordinance submitted to City Council



## Open Space Implementation Plan

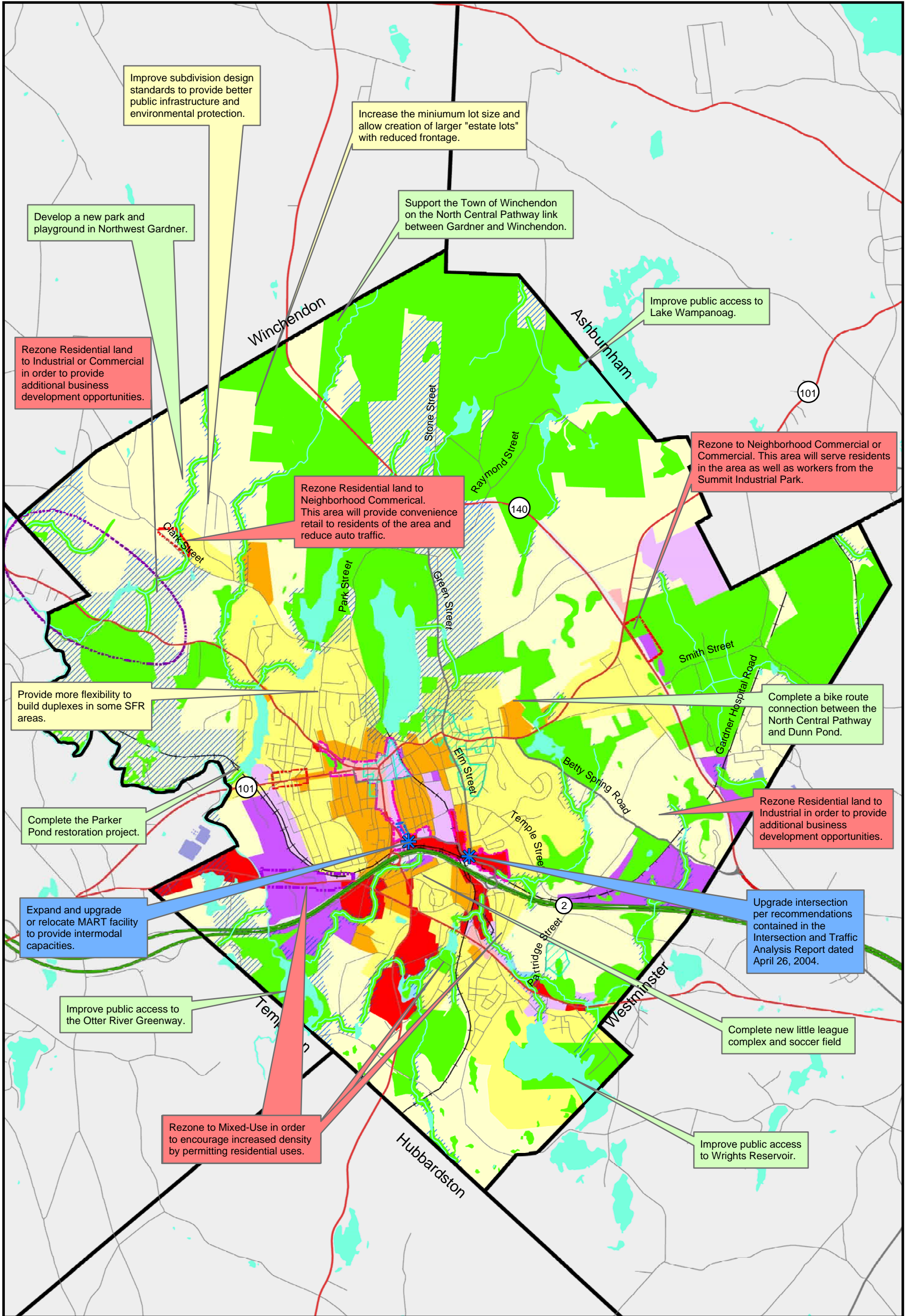
Item #	Description	Responsibility	Importance	Time Frame	Notes
O1-5	Identify and set priorities for acquiring additional open space parcels, particularly in the Watershed Protection District	Planning Board/ Conservation Commission	High	Medium	–
O1-6	Establish GIS systems	Engineering Department	High	Medium	–
O1-7	Promote awareness of the benefits of donating open space.	Planning Board/ Conservation Commission	High	Medium	–
<b>Open Space Policy 2: Improve Gardner's recreational resources and facilities .</b>					
O2-1	Complete the design and construction of improvements to Greenwood Memorial Pool	Trustees	High	Medium	Design of handicap accessibility in FY2005 CDBG
O2-2	Develop a new park and playground in Northwest Gardner	Planning Board	High	Medium	–
O2-3	Support the Town of Winchendon on the North Central Pathway link between Gardner and Winchendon	DCDP	High	Medium	–
O2-4	Improve public access to Lake Wampanoag	DCDP	Medium	Long-Term	–
O2-5	Complete a bike route connection between the North Central Pathway and Dunn Pond	DCDP	Medium	Medium	–
O2-6	Complete the Parker Pond restoration project	DCDP	Medium	Long-Term	–



**Open Space Implementation Plan**

<b>Item #</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Importance</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Notes</b>
O2-7	Improve public access to the Otter River Greenway	DCDP Conservation Commission	High	Ongoing	–
O2-8	Complete a new little league complex and soccer field	DCDP	High	Medium	–
O2-9	Improve public access to Wright's Reservoir	DCDP	Medium	Long-Term	–





Improve subdivision design standards to provide better public infrastructure and environmental protection.

Increase the minimum lot size and allow creation of larger "estate lots" with reduced frontage.

Develop a new park and playground in Northwest Gardner.

Support the Town of Winchendon on the North Central Pathway link between Gardner and Winchendon.

Rezone Residential land to Industrial or Commercial in order to provide additional business development opportunities.

Improve public access to Lake Wampanoag.

Rezone Residential land to Neighborhood Commercial. This area will provide convenience retail to residents of the area and reduce auto traffic.

Rezone to Neighborhood Commercial or Commercial. This area will serve residents in the area as well as workers from the Summit Industrial Park.

Provide more flexibility to build duplexes in some SFR areas.

Complete a bike route connection between the North Central Pathway and Dunn Pond.

Complete the Parker Pond restoration project.

Rezone Residential land to Industrial in order to provide additional business development opportunities.

Expand and upgrade or relocate MART facility to provide intermodal capacities.

Upgrade intersection per recommendations contained in the Intersection and Traffic Analysis Report dated April 26, 2004.

Improve public access to the Otter River Greenway.

Complete new little league complex and soccer field

Rezone to Mixed-Use in order to encourage increased density by permitting residential uses.

Improve public access to Wrights Reservoir.

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Prepared for  
**City of Gardner**

Project  
**Gardner Economic Development Plan**

Drawing:  
**Putting it All Together Map**

**Legend**

Existing Overlay District	Commercial I	Absolute Development Constraints
Historic District	Commercial II	Partial Development Constraints
New Industrial	General Residential	
New Neighborhood Commercial	Industrial I	
Mixed Use District	Industrial II	
Redevelopment Project Area	Rural Residential	
	Single Family Residential	
	Other	
	Water	

1" = 3,500 Feet  
 1,750 875 0 1,750 FT

Date: 5/12/04  
 Proj. Mgr.: MMG  
 Design: ICE  
 Drawn: ICE  
 Job #: 1.2216.00  
 Last Rev: 6/21/04

**Figure 1**  
 1  
 of 2



