



1 INTRODUCTION

The Gardner Comprehensive Plan serves as a guide to harness the City's untapped potential. It foresees a place with a variety of housing and employment opportunities, plentiful open space and recreational areas, a strong Downtown core, and a clear identity. The Plan represents the community's shared values and the City's dedication to economic sustainability.

Gardner is a city that has maintained its rich history and traditional character, but is poised for growth and transformation. It is a place where residents and businesses are actively engaged in their community and committed to shaping the future of their city.

Since the most recent update of the City of Gardner's Comprehensive Plan in 2008, the community has experienced changes in several factors that impact its long-term growth potential and pattern. The City enjoyed rapid growth between 1990 and the mid-2000's, but a nationwide recession caused a near halt to new investment after 2008. At the same time, the Logistics Park Kansas City Intermodal Facility and New Century AirCenter have expanded the area's regional prominence as a center for industry and commerce.

As the City postures itself for new growth, leaders determined it appropriate to update its Comprehensive Plan. This process, begun in 2013, provided the opportunity to establish a comprehensive vision that aims to balance a number of elements that collectively define the image, character, and quality of life in Gardner. The Comprehensive Plan tells the story of Gardner: where it's been, where it is now, and where it is going.



PURPOSE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

This Comprehensive Plan represents a collective effort from the Gardner community to define a vision for the future, and identify the actions to be taken to realize the community's aspirations; it represents both a process and a product. The initial process included an extensive public outreach program that allowed residents, businesses, agencies, local government, and other stakeholders to help draft the Plan's recommendations. The resulting product is an overarching policy guide that aims to provide context for future decision-making by City government and other partners. The adoption of this document is not the end of the planning process, but the beginning of an on-going implementation effort by the City and community stakeholders.

CORE THEMES OF THE PLAN

Throughout the comprehensive planning process, there were several recurrent themes that were discussed by the community, key stakeholders, elected and appointed officials, and planning professionals. This Plan should serve as an overall policy guide that seeks to address these themes and ensure that actions maximize their potential long-term benefits to citizens of Gardner. The predominant themes include:

Housing Variety. In order for Gardner to support on-going investment in housing and attract new residents to the community, it is critical that local housing stock respond to a variety of users, including young professionals, new families, middle-aged professionals, empty-nesters, and seniors in need of assistance.

Local Employment Growth. Gardner aspires to transform itself from a historically bedroom community to one that hosts local employment opportunities that allow residents to live close to work and support local commerce.

Image and Identity. Gardner's local and regional identity are in flux as the community evolves from a small town on the edge of the Kansas City growth area to a center for industry and commerce that is well connected to a large portion of the region's population.

Capitalizing on Regional Transportation Assets. I-35, the Logistics Park Kansas City Intermodal Facility, and New Century AirCenter provide the foundation for regional employment and commercial opportunities that can benefit Gardner through new development and local spending capacity.

Fiscal Sustainability. Municipal investment in facilities, services and infrastructure should be closely coordinated with land use policies and services provided by other agencies in order to ensure high value on taxpayer investment.

A Strong City Center. Downtown Gardner is the heart of the City and is recognized as a focal point for government activities, community character, and traditional retail and commerce.

Green Connections. Pedestrian connections, bicycle trails, and environmental corridors are considered important aspects for long-term development that supports an active lifestyle, stormwater management and flood mitigation, and preservation of local ecosystems.



COMPREHENSIVE PLAN PROCESS

The Comprehensive Plan was developed over a process that lasted approximately one year. It was specifically designed to ensure that the Comprehensive Plan is directly reflective of the community's vision for Gardner. The following points describe some of the aspects of the Gardner Comprehensive Plan process.

PROJECT INITIATION & DATA COLLECTION

Before work began, a project initiation meeting was held to set the foundation for the planning program, and to review and discuss the overall direction and policy issues facing the community. Participants in the project initiation meeting included City staff, key personnel from the consultant team, and members of the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee. This step allowed City staff and Advisory Committee members to identify relevant documents or policies that should be evaluated as part of the data inventory.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH & ISSUES IDENTIFICATION

Community outreach included both face-to-face and web-based activities to obtain the broadest level of participation in preparing the Plan. Outreach was included throughout the entire process, providing the opportunity for participants to identify issues, establish a vision, and review draft recommendations.



ANALYSIS OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

This step included the analysis of existing conditions and future potential within the community based on information provided by the City, feedback from community service providers and reconnaissance, surveys, inventories, and analyses undertaken by the consultant team.

COMMUNITY VISIONING WORKSHOP

The community visioning session involved the consultant team, City staff, the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee, elected officials, and members of the community. This session included both large group and small group working sessions to review and discuss desired improvements within the City.

VISION , GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Following the visioning workshop, the consultant summarized the results of the group discussions, and prepared a preliminary vision statement, and preliminary goals and objectives to provide more specific focus and direction for planning recommendations.

DEVELOPMENT OF CITY-WIDE PLANS

This step included the preparation of future plans for land use; residential, commercial, and industrial areas; parks, open space and environmental features; community facilities; urban design and community character; and community sustainability. These future plans represent the “core” of the Comprehensive Plan, and are built on community input and the City of Gardner’s goals and objectives.

CREATION OF DRAFT PLAN DOCUMENT

Based on previous steps in the process, the draft version of the Comprehensive Plan document was prepared for local review and consideration. The Plan is designed to serve as a policy document for guiding land use and development, capital improvements, administration, and collaboration. The Plan also provides an implementation strategy that identifies specific projects and actions that need to be undertaken for the City to realize the Plan’s recommendations.

REVIEW & ADOPTION

The final stages of the process included a review of the plan by the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee, followed by a work session by the Planning Commission and a community open house to encourage public review and comment. Following the open house, the Planning Commission conducted a public hearing and adopted the Plan. The Plan was then introduced to the City Council in a work session and subsequently presented to the City council for consideration and adoption.



ORGANIZATION OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Gardner Comprehensive Plan is divided into the following chapters:

1. **Introduction** – a description of the purpose of the plan, process, and content.
2. **Community Profile** – a snapshot of the City of Gardner, as it is today, that establishes the basis for recommendations in subsequent chapters.
3. **Public Participation** – a summary of the public outreach activities that took place during the comprehensive planning process, and the outcomes they produced.
4. **Vision, Goals, and Objectives** – an articulation of the shared vision for Gardner and a description of the goals and objectives for achieving the community's vision.
5. **Land Use Plan** – a future land use map for the City of Gardner and subsequent recommendations for the residential, commercial, and industrial areas of the community.
6. **Community Facilities and Services** – recommendations related to the maintenance of existing facilities and the future expansion of community facilities and services.
7. **Transportation and Mobility** – recommendations related to roadways, bicycle and pedestrian mobility, transit, and airports.
8. **Environmental Features and Open Space** – recommendations for enhancing the benefits of parks, open space, and environmental features which help to define the community's quality of life.
9. **Image and Identity** – recommendations related to the character, image, and appearance of the community including streetscape, gateways, development character, and more.
10. **Sustainability Framework** – a foundation of sustainability policies, initiatives, and program development.
11. **Implementation** – specific actions required to carry out the new Comprehensive Plan including recommendations regarding regulations, economic development strategies, priority improvement projects, general administration, and updates to the Plan.