



# 3 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public participation and input is the cornerstone of the Comprehensive Plan. The Plan is founded upon the thoughts, concerns, and aspirations of the residents and businesses that call Gardner home. In this way, the City of Gardner Comprehensive Plan serves as a true reflection of the City.

This chapter of the Comprehensive Plan provides a summary of the range of public outreach events that occurred throughout the planning process. It also includes an overview of online outreach efforts that included resident and business surveys as well as a web-based mapping tool. The culmination of these results provided the foundation upon which the Gardner Comprehensive Plan was built.



## TRADITIONAL OUTREACH

Community members had several opportunities to meet with City representatives and one another to discuss the future of Gardner. These “in-person” meetings included a community workshop, business workshop, visioning workshop, meeting with the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC), and interviews with community and faith leaders.

## KICK-OFF MEETING

The Comprehensive Plan public outreach process had its official “kick-off” meeting on October 14, 2013. The meeting consisted of members of the Gardner Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC). This committee is comprised of residents, and business owners, and community leaders who are donating their time and knowledge about Gardner to help shape the Comprehensive Plan. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce the planning process to the CPAC, as well as get a sense of the issues and concerns affecting the community. The CPAC was asked a series of questions regarding potential projects that would benefit Gardner and the City’s existing strengths and assets from which the Plan could build upon.

## COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

As part of the planning process for the Gardner Comprehensive Plan, members of the community had the first of many opportunities to provide valuable input at a community-wide workshop. On the evening of Thursday, November 21, 2013, community members gathered at City Hall to discuss their hopes and concerns regarding the City of Gardner. They were asked several questions, the responses of which are summarized below.

Participants were asked to identify the five most important issues confronting the City of Gardner. There were a broad and varied range of answers, however, the majority of participants cited the need to improve infrastructure, promote a business-friendly environment, and create a unique, small-town identity. Additional responses are categorized below:



### Infrastructure

- Aging infrastructure
- Need for infrastructure maintenance
- Ensure infrastructure supports growth

### Community Facilities

- Lack of a community center
- Improving the police station
- Understaffed police department
- Increasing # of police officers at schools
- Improve parks and recreational facilities
- Condition of some municipal buildings

### Land Use

- Accommodating development and buffering neighborhoods
- Enhancing development at Center and Main Streets
- Create more housing diversity
- Need for more high quality single family homes
- Create unique development, no big box stores like neighboring towns
- Need for more residential and commercial development

### Transportation & Mobility

- Impacts of train traffic
- Improving traffic flow through the City
- Speed of traffic along Main Street
- Need for additional traffic lights
- Limited access from Interstate 35
- Intersection of Moonlight Road and Main Street

### Community Character & Identity

- Improving perception of the City
- Maintain unique identity

### Other

- Taxes
- Improve relationship with Edgerton
- Permitting process
- Revise zoning/sign ordinance
- City policies and codes – updates and enforcement
- Promote a business friendly environment
- Annexation
- Make City more competitive
- Impact of Intermodal facility
- Citizen apathy

Participants were asked to name specific projects and actions the City should undertake. The input summarized below is presented in no specific order of importance or priority.

- Make it easier and less expensive (taxes, incentives) for businesses to come to Gardner
- Enhance the parks and recreation system by extending and connecting the trail system and updating facilities
- Create a buffer between the intermodal facility and residential areas, which can be used as a greenway to expand the trail system
- Build a new police station
- Revitalize Downtown by attracting and retaining businesses
- Move the County Fair Grounds to a different location and open up site for potential development
- Finance upgrades to infrastructure
- Make transportation improvements, including the installation of lights at 183rd Street and Center Street
- Improve all rail crossings, which include building grade-separated crossings, implementing safe routes to schools strategies, and creating a quiet zone from Waverly to Moonlight
- Create more flexible zoning regulations
- Improve and upgrade the Gardner Airport, including the addition of more hangars





Workshop participants were asked to identify assets that should be preserved and built upon in Gardner. The responses below are presented in no specific order of importance or priority.

- Safe community
- Close-knit, family-oriented community
- Great schools
- Having 2 airports
- Location
- I-35 Corridor
- #1 in the world for manufacturing refrigerator magnets
- Development and growth potential
- Hosting the County Fair – gives identity and is a great attraction
- Great City staff
- Great electric utility

## BUSINESS WORKSHOP

Nearly three dozen members of the Gardner business community convened at City Hall on Friday, November 22, 2013 to discuss the future of Gardner's business climate. The Gardner Business Workshop provided a forum for business owners and representatives to discuss their thoughts regarding the City's business climate.

Several questions were asked of the participants which led to lively discussions on topics ranging from the City's assets to development concerns.

Participants were asked to list the biggest issues and concerns confronting the City of Gardner. The most pressing concerns regarded a need to upgrade infrastructure facilities throughout the City, and to create a positive image for businesses looking to locate in Gardner. The remaining responses have been grouped into the following categories:

### Infrastructure

- Overall infrastructure improvements
- Infrastructure maintenance
- Higher internet speeds

### Growth

- Ability to accommodate growth
- Lack of growth
- Need to focus on attracting new residents

### Economic Development

- Marketing and promotion
- Business attraction and retention
- Need for bigger mix of businesses
- Grow the Chamber of Commerce
- Create a merchants' association
- Diversity growth of tax base
- Need for downtown promotion

### Transportation & Mobility

- Need for more downtown parking
- Traffic flow and control
- Turn lanes needed on Main Street



### Community Character & Image

- Enhancing the appearance of downtown
- Emphasis of downtown as a retail hub
- Lack of central gathering place
- Perception/reputation towards small businesses
- Define the identity of Gardner

### City Governance

- High cost of doing business
- Property taxes
- Water retention costs
- Policy implementation and consistency
- Better communication
- Accommodating a business-friendly environment
- Need for more citizen engagement
- Taking advantage of the intermodal
- Need for business incentives

Members of the business community were asked to name specific projects and actions the City should take to improve the business climate. The following list summarizes the responses:

- Create a larger community center/ central gathering place (only place is at the senior center)
- Improve infrastructure across the board (internet, roads, etc.)
- Improve communication and increase citizen engagement
- Create a committee to explore taking advantage of the intermodal facility
- Create an economic development department in the City that can implement incentives and help grow the Chamber of Commerce
- Intergovernmental collaboration
- Ensure the Comprehensive Plan is implemented by City staff
- Install gateway signage
- Beautification of Downtown
- Improve parking
- Improve the internet
- Lower business startup costs
- Create better traffic flow on Main Street/US-56 through signals and/or decommissioning US-56

Lastly, participants were asked to cite the strengths and assets of having a business in Gardner. The following list summarizes the responses:

- City has a lot of potential
- Good location
- Little competition
- Good schools
- Small-town feel
- Affordable to live in Gardner



## FAITH BASED COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

On January 30, 2014, representatives from many of the local churches and religious institutions met to discuss issues, concerns, and thoughts regarding the future of Gardner. The conversation covered many different topics ranging from general issues regarding development and traffic to those more specifically focused on the faith based community. Issues discussed included:

- An increasing number of people are in need of assistance offered by many of the churches
- A coordinated effort between the City, County, public agencies and churches would benefit the community
- Regular meetings with the group and City leaders would help to keep the leaders and their constituents informed
- In general, the leaders also shared the same concerns as residents and business leaders regarding growth, development, infrastructure, and related issues

While most of the individuals knew one another, some were new or had never met. All agreed that this type of meeting was good for the community and gave them an opportunity to exchange ideas. There was a consensus that the leaders were willing to take an active role in helping to spread the word about the importance of participating in the planning process. Everyone expressed their appreciation for being invited to the workshop and having had the opportunity to contribute to the community.

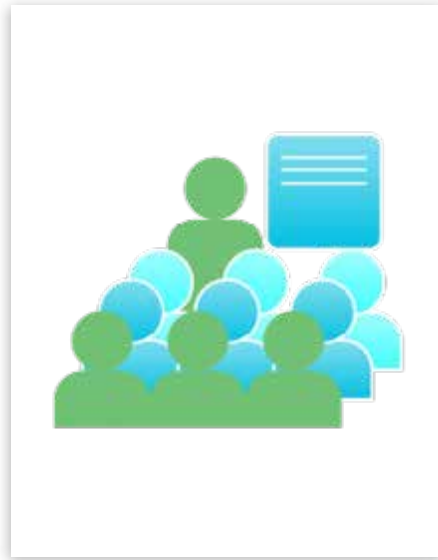
## KEY PERSON INTERVIEWS

A series of interviews were held with stakeholders and community leaders who have unique or specific insights regarding the Gardner community. These confidential interviews were used to provide a more in-depth understanding of potential opportunities within the City and any underlying challenges facing the Gardner community. Interviews were open-ended, to allow for pointed discussions regarding specific issues affecting the City and possible solutions. Much of the input confirmed the findings of the Community and Business Workshops, while also providing additional background and detail on several of the issues identified during the public outreach process.



## ONLINE OUTREACH

In addition to attending the in-person community meetings, residents and businesses had the opportunity to voice their thoughts and concerns via online surveys and an interactive mapping tool. The results of the online outreach are summarized below.

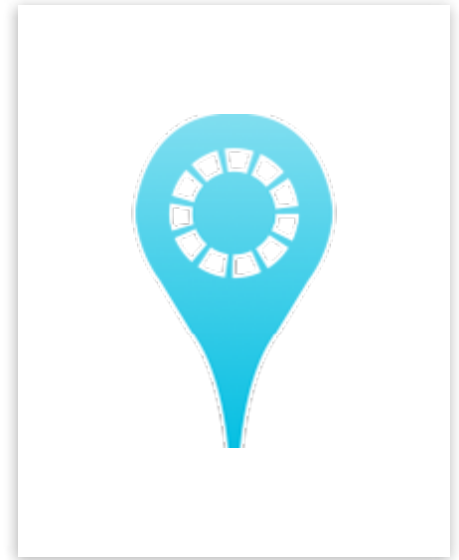


## RESIDENT QUESTIONNAIRES

During the planning process, 275 people responded to the online questionnaire. The majority of respondents (65%) have lived in Gardner between six and twenty years. Those who have lived in the City for less than ten years reported moving to Gardner for the high-quality schools, price and quality of housing, and/or for an employment opportunity.

Gardner schools were cited as the City's greatest strength. Additional assets include Gardner's location and accessibility, residential neighborhoods, and growth potential. The City's greatest weaknesses include City government and services, commercial shopping areas, and taxes. Sixty percent of respondents rated Main Street/Downtown as an important area to attract new businesses and a majority supported the use of tax incentives to support business retention and development in the City. However, it was noted that incentives should go toward supporting small business owners, as opposed to larger franchises.

The majority of residents are proud to be living in Gardner. There are several issues that need to be addressed, but residents are willing and ready to make positive changes. The top three issues the Comprehensive Plan should address include (1) development and growth potential, (2) commercial and shopping areas, and (3) City government and services.



## BUSINESS QUESTIONNAIRES

Nearly two dozen Gardner businesses participated in the online business surveys. Respondents included a wide range of businesses throughout the City, however, half of all respondents' businesses are located along Main Street, and half of the business owners live in the City while the other half do not.

72% of respondents feel that local regulations are a disadvantage to their business, while 62% felt that visibility and access to customers is an advantage to their business. Participants rated a variety of public facilities and services within the City as poor, fair, or good; 69% of participants indicated that the municipal permitting and approval process is poor, 77% of participants indicated that the regional arterials/state roads are fair, and 81% of participants indicated that police and fire protection are good.

When asked what improvements they would like to make to their business, a variety of responses were cited, but 43% would not like to make any, 21% would like to make landscaping improvements, and 21% would like to invest in a new sign. Other improvements included remodeling, a new façade or storefront, and/or new equipment. When asked what improvements they would most like to see made in the City, 100% said that they would like to see more support for local businesses, 62% said that they would like to see more public relations/promotion for the City, and 62% would like to see lower taxes.



## SMAP

sMap is an interactive online tool that allows community members to create their own maps of Gardner. Users can use the system to pinpoint areas of concern, undesirable uses, community assets, poor appearance, development priority sites, and more. During the planning process, 14 individual maps were created, identifying 157 points.

## Community Asset

A community asset point identifies locations that the community participant would like to see maintained or enhanced in the future. Users recognized 23 community asset points throughout Gardner and included a number of parks and community facilities.

## Desired Use/Development

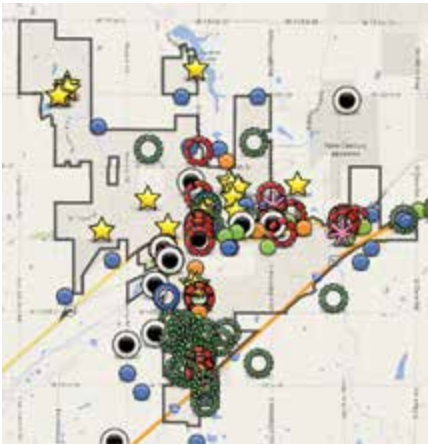
A desired use/development point identifies a location that the community participant would like to see developed in the future. Participants identified 28 desired use/development points throughout Gardner that included desired residential, industrial, commercial, and other possible uses.

## Development Priority Site

A development priority site identifies a location that the community participant feels should be developed or redeveloped in the short term. The community identified 30 development priority sites throughout Gardner and included areas for expansion, commercial development, possible locations for development Downtown, and several other ideas.

## Key Transit Destinations

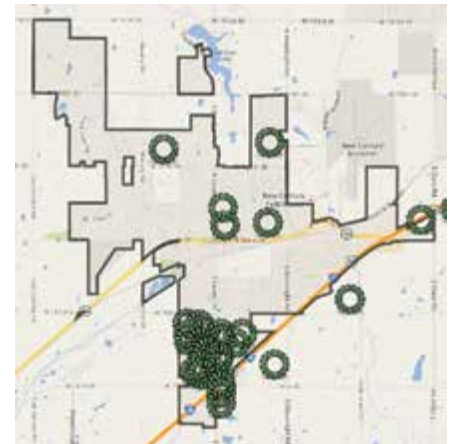
A key transit destination point identifies an area in the community that should be better served by public transit. Two points were identified in Gardner as key transit destinations, identifying the Moonlight Commons and the Walmart shopping areas.



sMap Summary Map



Community Assets



Development Priority Sites



Desired Use/Development



Key Transit Destinations



### Poor Appearance

A poor appearance point identifies an area that a participant feels is unsightly or could benefit from additional landscaping or aesthetic improvements. Users identified 16 points throughout the City and generally focused on the US-56/Main Street corridor and S. Gardner Road.

### Problematic Intersection

A problematic intersection point identifies a location that the community participant feels is a safety concern and/or an intersection that impacts the flow of traffic. A total of 35 points identified problematic intersections along major corridors of Gardner including US-56/Main Street, Center Street, and Moonlight Road.



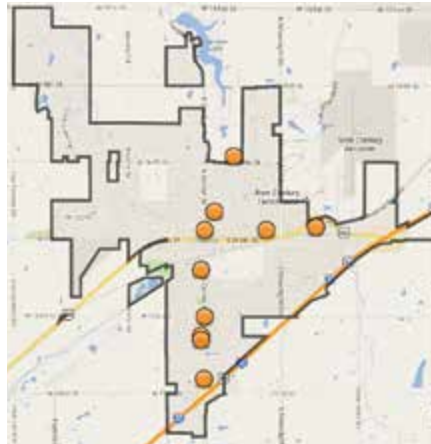
Areas of Poor Appearance

### Public Safety Concern

A public safety concern point identifies a location within the community that a participant feels may pose a concern due to crime, pedestrian safety, or other reasons. Users placed 10 points of public safety concerns throughout the City and were generally identified along major corridors such as Center Street/S Gardner Road, and the US-56/Main Street corridor.

### Undesirable Use

An undesirable use point identifies an existing use in the community that the participant feels is not in line with the vision for the community. Only two points were identified as undesirable uses and included the road to Edgerton (183rd Street), and the Johnson County Fairgrounds.



Public Safety Concern

### Other

Users identified 11 other points that suggested a quiet zone along the railroad tracks that is adjacent to a residential area, a desired bridge expansion, and areas that lie just outside of the community that participants would like to see annexed.



Other



Problematic Intersections



Undesirable Use