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A Gateway to Economic Success

Nathan R. Boudreau

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A Gateway to Economic Success

Nathan R. Boudreau

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Advisor: Mary PieceWicz

Abstract:

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is a leader in the United States, a gleaming example of the American dream and the way life should be. We are always at the forefront of world-class innovation, house arts and culture that rival some of the best cities in the world, and have high-class educational institutes rivaled by almost no other region. Massachusetts leads the way when it comes to progressive ideals that provide for the less fortunate and ensure equality for all while keeping taxes reasonable, unemployment down, and living wage jobs readily available. With all that said, I began to ponder why our economic development and grants system was centered around Gateway Cities. There is a concern in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts regarding gateway cities and their effectiveness. Despite significant investment into the support and development of sizable former manufacturing and mill communities, it seems the Gateway Cities program has failed at creating economic and fiscal growth midpoints. A majority of the investment into these communities has been mismanaged. A large portion of this financial boost has stayed within the geographical barrier and not trickled out into the surrounding communities as initially intended. Has this investment from the Commonwealth changed anything or caused increased metrics in these communities? This problem has negatively affected non-gateway communities and made these once prosperous mill towns even more reliant on state funds. Turning negatives into positives, I believe the COVID-19 funding mechanism and the federal, state, and local partnership therein is the best way to re-distribute the Gateway funds to assist Massachusetts municipalities with overcoming covid and future economic and cultural developmental needs.

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Introduction: A Centralized Region with a Centralized Problem

Central Massachusetts is comprised of six general regions: the 395 Corridor, Blackstone Valley, Sturbridge Townships, Wachusett, North Central, and Worcester. Central Massachusetts is a travel and tourist-heavy region of the Commonwealth, offering unique glimpses into the quaint corner of the world that many call home. In fact, more than 3,220 people are employed in the tourism industry in Central Massachusetts, which accounts for a payroll of over \$90 million on an annual basis (Discover Central Massachusetts, 2021).

The 395 Corridor includes the towns of Auburn, Oxford, Dudley, and Webster. The 395 Corridor is home to Lake Chargoggagoggmanchauggagoggchaubunagungamaugg, historically known for its unique namesake (also known as Webster Lake). Along the shores of the uniquely named body of water is the Indian Ranch, which pulls in tourists from across the Commonwealth. Additionally, Oxford is the hometown of Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross (Discover Central Massachusetts, 2021).

The Blackstone Valley region of Central Massachusetts stretches from Worcester, Massachusetts, to Providence, Rhode Island. The region once played a significant role in the American Industrial Revolution and is known for its incredible fall foliage, quaint New England villages, and expansive outdoor recreation. The communities of Blackstone, Douglas, Grafton, Mendon, Millbury, Millville, Northbridge, Sutton, Upton, Uxbridge, and Whitinsville make up the Blackstone Valley region (Discover Central Massachusetts, 2021).

The Sturbridge Townships region of Central Massachusetts is most notably known for the largest outdoor living history museum in the Northeast located in Sturbridge, MA, Old Sturbridge Village. The museum recreates life in a rural New England village in the late 1700s to early 1800s. Throughout all of the Sturbridge Townships, there are also many orchards, maple

sugar houses, and other rural New England-Esq sites to see and activities to enjoy. The Sturbridge Townships include Brookfield, Charlton, East Brookfield, Hardwick, North Brookfield, New Braintree, Southbridge, Spencer, Sturbridge, West Brookfield, and Warren (Discover Central Massachusetts, 2021).

The Wachusett region of Central Massachusetts is known for abundant wildlife and outdoor recreational activities. Most notably, Wachusett Mountain, which boasts activities for every age during every distinct New England season. The Wachusett region includes the communities of Berlin, Boylston, Holden, Oakham, Paxton, Rutland, and West Boylston (Discover Central Massachusetts, 2021).

The Worcester region of Central Massachusetts; the only region more accustomed to city life rather than rural New England. Worcester, Massachusetts, is the second-largest city in New England. Worcester is home to more than 35,000 college students in addition to their permanent residents. Worcester also has a regional airport with direct flights to other major cities in Florida and New York. The other communities in the Worcester region include Auburn, Leicester, and Shrewsbury (Discover Central Massachusetts, 2021).

Rounding out Central MA, just to the north is North Central Massachusetts, consisting of Ashburnham, Ashby, Athol, Ayer, Barre, Clinton, Devens, Fitchburg, Gardner, Groton, Harvard, Hubbardston, Lancaster, Leominster, Lunenburg, Orange, Pepperell, Petersham, Phillipston, Princeton, Royalston, Shirley, Sterling, Templeton, Townsend, Westminster, and Winchendon. This quintessential New England region because it is near and dear to my heart and was once a thriving economic region that people traveled from all over the world to live, work, and chase the American Dream. Work was plentiful, and the region was rife with opportunity. Until the work

began to filter outside of the region and money began to flood into the bigger cities and out of Massachusetts as a whole.

My Chair At The Table

My passion for governmental service derives from my passion for my hometown of Gardner, Massachusetts. Gardner is a City in Northern Worcester County with approximately 20,000 residents as of the 2010 census, but the true value in this community derives from its intense sense of communal pride and a history built on the back of the industrial revolution. From big chairs to the little papers that top every single Hershey's Kiss, Gardner is a former industrial giant feeling the squeeze of business going overseas more and more every year. However, with the addition of a thriving hospital, a community college, and a MCI facility, this proud industry town is now a place so many call home. (Moore, 1969)

In 1774, the area now known as Gardner consisted of several land tracts in Ashburnham, Winchendon, Westminster, and Templeton, which were connected by three roads. Access to those surrounding towns was a treacherous journey and impossible during the winter months. Due to their inability to worship or purchase supplies once the Revolutionary War had ended, many began to wonder about their civic affairs. Prominent Furniture and Cabinetry makers Captain Elisha Jackson, Lieutenant Seth Heywood, John Glazier, and Samuel Eaton began to think of a new town to call their own. Jackson then drafted a petition that would take corners of the Towns of Ashburnham, Winchendon, Templeton, and Westminster and create the Town of Gardner. Gardner was a thriving economic center for many years, even earning the moniker of the "Furniture Capital" (Moore, 1969).

Much like the country, state, and county it falls in, Gardner is a melting pot of different ethnic groups who arrived here at different times for many different reasons. Gardner has a vast population of Irish, French Canadian, Scandinavian, Lithuanian, Polish, Lebanese, and Italian American citizens. Personally, near and dear to my heart is how the French Canadians arrived in Gardner. During the late 1800s, several small furniture companies were about to explode into industrial giants due to experienced management, excellent capital, and an upgraded transportation system that allowed easier access to New York and Western Markets; all that was missing was skilled labor. Due to economic and agricultural struggles in Quebec, many French Canadian citizens were beginning to feel the squeeze and a downgrade in their standard of living; so in droves, they started heading towards industrial communities in the United States. Gardner was one of the biggest benefactors of this move. Between 1865 and 1885, over 3,000 French Canadians moved to the Chair Town (Moore, 1969).

Upon arrival, these new citizens faced various difficulties in almost every aspect of their new home. Their new jobs were industrial instead of agricultural, English was the primary language, and they spoke French. Gardner was a primarily protestant community and Roman Catholic. Once realizing this issue, the French Canadians acted as many do when they enter a strange territory and attempt to preserve their past. The area in northwest Gardner known as “Little Canada” was and still is home to many prominent French Canadian businesses, homes, a social club, and a giant church that moved from Canada with the citizens. Gardner is full of these communities within communities as today there is still a French, Polish, and Lithuanian part of the City. (Moore, 1969).

Over the next several decades, the industry began to go overseas, leaving Gardner and many communities like it to try and find itself without its major source of income and pride.

Many new things have come and gone during the transitional phase, but a new era of business development began when Heywood Hospital, MCI Gardner, and Mount Wachusett Community College became the biggest local employers (City of Gardner, 2021).

The city of Gardner is primarily a family community, with family households accounting for 60.9% of the population as of 2010. 41.7% of the community resides in a husband-wife family household, and 27.3% of the population has children under 18. Also, 55.6% of the population has either a child under the age of 18 or a person over 65 living in their household. Gardner is composed of 51.2% male citizens and 48.8% female citizens. The largest portion of citizens in Gardner are between the ages of 45 and 49 (for both males and females), and the median age of citizens is 40.6 (United States Census Bureau.)

In 2019 58.2% of Gardner 16 years and over were employed in the labor force. Prior to COVID, the unemployment rate in Gardner was 10.1%. 84.3% of the population was employed in the labor force were classified as private wage and salary workers, 11.7% government workers, and 4% were self-employed. The median household income in Gardner, MA, is around \$50,000, and a majority of Gardner (21.7%) has an annual household income of between \$50,000-74,999. However, 16.1% of the population's annual household income was below the poverty level (United States Census Bureau).

Gardner is a city with plentiful potential that has been struggling and fighting an uphill battle ever since most of its industrial businesses left for cheaper work in other countries or just couldn't foot the bill heading towards the new millennium. However, Gardner is not alone, most of Central Massachusetts has been in the same boat trying to find a way to ensure economic, social, educational security for future generations. These problems were significantly worsened during the COVID-19 Pandemic with many communities losing most of their business prospects,

but it is my theory that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts could use the infrastructure of the CARES Act to re-allocate money from an underperforming and ultra particular funding initiative to aid all 351 Massachusetts Cities and Towns in economic, educational, and social advancement in a post covid world.

Literature Review

One of the largest problems facing Gateway Cities is the high poverty rates. The original 11 Gateway Cities were home to 30 percent of all Massachusetts residents living below the poverty line in 2008. Concentrated poverty is specifically an issue in Springfield and Holyoke, with 34 and 51 percent of their poor living in high-poverty neighborhoods. To put this into perspective, New Orleans had a concentrated poverty rate of 38 percent during Hurricane Katrina (Muro et al., 2007). Gateway Cities also tend to have much higher poverty rates than their non-Gateway neighboring cities. Brockton and New Bedford have poverty rates of 18.6 and 23.4 percent, while Newton's poverty rate is 5.1 percent (Costa, 2017).

The high poverty rates in Gateway Cities can be attributed to the high unemployment rates, lack of job creation, and negative economy. This is exemplified through the previously economic powerhouses through their textile factories, Lowell and Lawrence. When the textile industry left this area, wealth and economic development also decreased. Since then, there has not been a lot of workforce development in either community. However, Lowell is finding more success through the Gateway City Program. This can be attributed to large stakeholders, such as UMass Lowell. Large institutions and businesses can form alliances with City Hall and create opportunities that will benefit Lowell residents (Leavy-Sperounis, 2010).

Examples of this are also evident in other Gateway Cities. Between 1970-2005, the Greater Boston area added about 467,000 new jobs (a growth rate of 51 percent). Meanwhile, Gateway Cities *lost* more than 11,000 jobs (a decline of about 3 percent). This means that the total number of private jobs in Gateway Cities has remained what it was in 1960. In addition, only about 20 percent of jobs in Gateway Cities fall into the high-value, high-pay category (financial services, health care, information technology, and knowledge creation). This is compared to about 28% in the Greater Boston area. While this may not seem like a large difference, the 28 percent in the Greater Boston area accounts for 43% of its payroll, and the 20% of the Gateway Cities account for only 27% of its payroll (Muro et al., 2007).

Re-investment into job creation is a major priority for the Gateway City Program. Many researchers have speculated on how this can be done successfully. First, by building a successful future workforce. Massachusetts must step up education and training efforts in the Gateway Cities. Building a successful middle-class workforce is essential to the success of the Gateway City Program. Secondly, creating new economic connections is vital. While historically, economic growth and success depended on individual businesses, factories, and mill towns, today's economic development depends on networking, partnerships, and building interconnected regions (Muro et al., 2007). One researcher recommended supporting business-friendly incentives from the government, such as tax breaks, affordable healthcare, and affordable housing. It is also important that the government support local business events to foster networking and increase the assets of Gateway Cities (Smith, 2010).

Interestingly, many businesses *prefer* locating their companies in Gateway Cities. The natural environment, affordable workspace, affordable housing, less traffic, and shorter commutes are all selling points to bringing businesses into Gateway Cities. The Gateway Cities

need to capitalize on all of these points. While improving their technology, utilities, and facilities, a company will naturally be drawn to these communities (Smith, 2010).

One focus area for the Gateway City Program is bringing public transit to Gateway Cities to connect them to larger hubs in the Greater Boston Area. While in theory, this may sound beneficial, in practice, this may only be beneficial to certain Gateway Cities. The biggest example of this is New Bedford and Fall River. It makes an absurd amount of sense to bring public transit to these communities, however, instead of connecting them with the Greater Boston area, connecting them with Providence, RI. Providence is a neighboring city to these Gateway Cities and would provide much more opportunity for current residents and new businesses. This plan would be much more aligned with the employment patterns of the New Bedford and Fall River area (Rosa, 2014).

Another major influence on the poverty rates and negative economy in Gateway Cities is the crime rates. Unfortunately, this is one indicator that has not received as much attention from the Gateway City Program as other potential indicators. In 2012, the Massachusetts communities with the highest volume of violent crime rates were (descending): Boston, Worcester, Springfield, Brockton, New Bedford, Fall River, Lawrence, Lynn, Chelsea, and Lowell. With the exception of Boston, all of these communities are identified as Gateway Cities. Some of the Gateway Cities have received funding for programs focused on reducing the crime rates. These programs have been beneficial in New Bedford, which has seen a declining crime rate since 2015. More focus should be placed on reducing the crime rates of these communities, as this can play a major role in the longevity of the success of the Gateway City Program (Costa, 2017).

Finally, the last major focus area of the Gateway City Program's implementation plan is education. Securing a well-thought-out education development plan is vital for education in Gateway Cities is potentially the most important focus area for many reasons. Only 16.5 percent of Gateway City residents have a four-year degree (Muro et al., 2007). This is problematic, as there is a significant increase in jobs that require some kind of post-secondary education. It is important to properly prepare the future workforce of Gateway Cities for the work environment that they will inherit. The Gateway City Program identified many objectives in solidifying a plan to make this happen. First, refocus state efforts on urban education and use state funds to invest in successful education reforms. Second, create stronger links between English language class and workforce development, and mobilize community leaders to support and expand literacy initiatives. Lastly, build a "dynamic community-wide learning system." Many leaders in Massachusetts believe that the education problems are strongly correlated to the housing issues in the state and the high rates of concentrated poverty in Gateway Cities. State policy must recognize this correlation and provide tools for students to succeed academically and provide economic diversity so that their communities can flourish (Driscoll & Wong, 2013).

A Gateway to Dependency

The Oxford Dictionary defines Gateway as "an opening that can be closed by a gate," which is exactly what the Gateway Cities Initiative has proven to be. This is an economic funding mechanism for large economic centers to squander large sums of taxpayer money through the economic, cultural, and economic program has proven over time to not be a booster for anything but the Gateway Cities themselves. Additionally, proving to be a hindrance as the communities become reliant on the funds instead of ensuring money within their operating budget and local economic, educational, and cultural support systems. There comes a time when

it is necessary to call a spade a spade and redistribute municipal economic stimulus in a more meaningful and efficient way. Gateway Cities are in no way to be left on an island alone, it just seems that there may be a better way to go about spreading the wealth. Although initially a great plan, the Gateway Cities Initiative has not stood the test of time.

In the beginning, the term “Gateway City” was used by a MassINC report to describe the state’s mill and manufacturing towns that were suffering economic problems during the new millennium. These problems are caused by many manufacturing and industrial jobs heading out of Massachusetts and our country in droves. The early Mass Inc report identified Brockton, Fall River, Fitchburg, Haverhill, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, New Bedford, Springfield, Pittsfield, and Worcester as Cities of concern. These communities were selected based on their manufacturing/industrial history, high poverty rates, low educational standards, and populations over 35,000. (MassINC, 2021)

Upon implementation from the Patrick Administration, the definition was broadened to include 24 communities defining them as “defines a Gateway City as a municipality where the median household income and per capita income are less than the state average, where the percentage of the population with a bachelor’s degree or higher is below the state average, and where the population exceeds 35,000.” This immediately charged MassInc with the creation of an organization with a budget and their own coordinator at the State House, whose primary purpose is to “coordinate and implement the Patrick Administration’s Gateway Cities agenda to best address the needs and fully maximize the potential of these 24 distinct municipalities.”(Hawke, 2012)

Benefits provided to Gateway Communities are plenty and come with a large price tag. Below are several examples of benefits provided to these Communities and not the other 325 communities.

- Green energy, Parks and Recreation, and Conservation funds
- State Tax Credit Increases for Housing and Economic Development Program
- Additional Educational Resources aimed towards retention, readiness, and secondary educational achievement.
- Additional Funds through the Gateway Plus Program that allows Gateway Communities to receive additional funds due to their Gateway designation.
- Opportunities to attend privileged events geared towards private sector development and advanced access to aid.

As stated in previous literature, one of the largest problems facing Gateway Cities is the high poverty rates. The original 11 Gateway Cities were home to 30 percent of all Massachusetts residents living below the poverty line in 2008. To put this into perspective, New Orleans had a concentrated poverty rate of 38 percent during Hurricane Katrina. These high poverty rates in Gateway Cities can be attributed to the high unemployment rates, lack of job creation, and negative economy. From 1970-2005, the Greater Boston area added about 467,000 new jobs while Gateway Cities *lost* more than 11,000 jobs. This means that the total number of private jobs in Gateway Cities has remained what it was in 1960. Re-investment into job creation is a major priority for the Gateway City Program. They aim to achieve this goal by increasing education and training efforts in the Gateway Cities to bridge the gap to the middle-class. This type of environment has made many businesses *prefer* locating their companies in Gateway Cities.

Investment into education is the second pillar of the Gateway Cities Initiative, securing a well-thought-out education development plan is vital for education in Gateway Cities is potentially the most important focus area for many reasons. First, properly preparing the future workforce of Gateway Cities for the work environment that they will inherit. The Gateway City Program aims to refocus state efforts on urban education and use state funds to invest in successful education reforms.

These goals are reiterated year after year, per MassINC's, "Top Gateway City Budget Proposals for FY22", released in early 2021. The organization has a goal of "building a strong middle class from within has long been at the core of the Gateway City economic development strategy. To execute this play, Gateway Cities must prepare their youth to succeed in the state's knowledge economy and work to ensure that a large number choose to stay and invest in the communities where they were raised."

Objective one is "Fully Funding Early College Expansion to Prepare More Youth for Success," this goal increases the percentage of students in Gateway Cities that have access and opportunity to receive post-secondary studies successfully. MassINC has been working towards this goal within Gateway Cities since 2013, highlighting Early College programs that "rigorously track high school graduates as they transition to post-secondary studies at both public and private institutions. All signs indicate these students are thriving. Buoyed by this success." This success will require a \$6.4 million appropriation in FY22 to support planned expansion which the organization described as "make-or-break for both the Gateway City growth formula and the state's larger effort to counter growing socioeconomic divides" (MassINC, 2021).

The second objective is “Lifting the Cap on HDIP to Help Gateway Cities Retain Successful Residents,” which would allow Gateway Communities to retain sought-after professionals by creating highly sought luxury housing in mid-sized urban communities. The Housing Development Incentive Program (HDIP) has already led to the construction of thousands of new housing units in Gateway Cities but is seeking the tripling the annual cap from \$10 to \$30 million to seek, develop, and build housing in these communities (MassINC, 2021).

MassINC continues to tie the needs of the Gateway Communities to the Commonwealth’s needs, which has proven to be a failed calculation due to the lack of communities in the program. Trickle-down economics has been proven a fallacy time and time again, and the doors opened for Gateway Cities would also be open for cities such as Gardner. But that hasn’t happened. Instead, Gateway Cities have received numerous advantages, in both monetary aid and economic development support.

The Gateway Cities Initiative is a wonderful program doing amazing work for the communities under its service umbrella. However, the way it was set up intentionally excludes many communities that fit the need and description in every way but population. Many Central Massachusetts communities, including Gardner, would benefit from inclusion in the Gateway Cities Initiative or similar grant programs.

Gardner is a perfect example of a Gateway City due to its manufacturing past and current economic, educational, and statistical data. With a median income and academic standards well below the state average. The only thing keeping communities like Gardner out of the Gateway Cities program is the population cap. The opposing view is that a population cap drop would dilute the program allowing many communities in, however, only between one and three new

communities would likely qualify under a Gateway Cities Initiative under new program guidelines with a lower population threshold. Investment in more communities is an investment into the economic and educational future of our entire state (Hawke, 2012).

Pre-COVID-19 was a tough situation for the communities of Central Massachusetts, however, there is a lesson to be learned from the way in which the federal and state programs worked together to fund municipalities needing aid amidst a global pandemic. Could this structure be applied to the Gateway Cities Initiative to assist more communities while still prioritizing centers of economic viability?

COVID-19 and Federal Assistance

The first acknowledgment of the virus was in Wuhan, China on January 5, 2020. Fast forward less than three months, and on March 27, 2020, the United States Center for Disease Control reported that the number of confirmed coronavirus cases had passed 100,000 in the United States. During that time, travel from many countries worldwide, including Canada, Mexico, and the UK, was limited to “essential travel only” or banned completely (Wallach & Myers, 2020).

In the United States, the Trump Administration created the White House Coronavirus Task Force led by former Vice President Pence and declared a national public health emergency on January 31, 2020. Additionally, hundreds of thousands of tests were sent from the World Health Organization (WHO) to dozens of labs worldwide by early February. However, the United States opted to rely exclusively on domestically developed tests. As a result, several issues arose with the Center for Disease Control (CDC)-issued tests throughout February. The

United States lost time in the beginning critical phases of controlling the spread of the virus (Wallach & Myers, 2020).

By the end of February, the CDC and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) displayed a clear shift in their sense of urgency around the virus and testing. Travel bans were expanded and testing criteria were widened. Additionally, Congress passed an \$8.6 billion supplemental appropriation bill to increase vaccine and treatment research, emergency telehealth, and preparedness (Wallach & Myers, 2020).

On March 13, 2020, former President Trump declared a national state of emergency. The Defense Production Act was activated to increase the production of personal protection equipment (PPE) and medical supplies. On March 27, 2020, former President Trump signed the CARES Act into law. Significant provisions of the law addressed the economic impact of the pandemic, and Title III included numerous provisions relating to testing, medical supply chains, drug review, telehealth, and support for healthcare workers (Wallach & Myers, 2020).

Beginning May 14, 2020, Massachusetts began allocating the CARES Act funds through the CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Fund – Municipal Program (“CvRF-MP”) to provide up to approximately \$502 million for municipalities on a per capita basis to address the public health crisis in their community. This distribution allowed \$224 million to be released in round one and \$100 million in a second round, with a reconciliation round available until the end of fiscal year 2022 (Executive Office for Administration and Finance, 2021).

Federal programs provided Massachusetts with a total of approximately \$2,700,000,000.00 for use on various expenditures. Of that money, roughly \$502,000,000.00 was appropriated to Massachusetts Cities and Towns through relief allocations doled out in three rounds. Round one occurred in May and June of 2020, 258 municipalities received nearly \$100

M in payments. Round 2, which occurred in October 2020, 267 municipalities received approximately \$224 M. and a current third round, which is structured as a reimbursement “reconciliation period” round, is currently accepting applications until at least June 30, 2021 (Mass.gov, 2021).

Before round one, The Commonwealth of Massachusetts gave each community a “Total Eligible Amount,” determined by population. Communities could then use their eligible amount as seen fit providing it was in direct response to the COVID-19 Pandemic Response and not included in the municipalities FY2020 budget. The Commonwealth provided municipalities with monies in a lump sum to deal with the COVID-19 Pandemic as an active and ongoing situation (Mass.gov, 2021).

Massachusetts Federally Subsidized COVID-19 Funding Sources available to municipalities:

- The Shared Street Program aids municipalities in developing and creating shared spaces for governmental, business, and transportation usage. This program provided grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$3000,000 for municipalities to implement and expand improvement projects to sidewalks, curbs, streets, on-street parking, and off-street parking lots. These projects are meant to support public health, safe mobility, and renewed commerce in the communities which utilize the program grants.
- The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program is a community development initiative that aids businesses and communities in development projects that support economic and/or cultural growth. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Massachusetts CDBG program was almost immediately transitioned to aid with economic and community development efforts.

- The Election Security Grant aides to assist municipal governments with the additional issues brought forth by unfunded mandate during an election cycle. An example of this is the mail-in voting mandated across our country during the presidential election of 2020.
- Additional CvRF Assistance for Municipalities - Additional CvRF dollars were provided to select municipalities with special COVID-19 related circumstances and impacts that warranted additional funding, such as high test rates or low vaccination rates.
- Emergency Solutions Grant aims at assisting the homeless by supporting housing initiatives.
- The Assistance to Firefighters Grant is rooted in enhancing the safety of firefighters concerning fire and fire-related hazards. Supplemental funding in fiscal year 2020 provides funds for additional gear and staffing due to COVID-19.
- The FEMA Public Assistance (PA) Grant Program reimburses municipalities for eligible costs incurred during a declared federal disaster. The COVID-19 pandemic was declared a major federal disaster in Massachusetts on March 27, 2020. This is to close the gap between CARES funding and actual cost.

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) is the latest COVID-19 relief package, signed into law in February 2021 by President Biden. The American Rescue Plan provides \$1.9 trillion in mandatory funding, program changes, and tax policy to mitigate the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The American Rescue Plan builds on previous COVID-19 aid and relief packages from 2020 (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2021).

The American Rescue Plan provides \$350 billion in state and local aid. The funds are provided to help states, counties, cities, and tribal governments pay for increased spending, recoup lost revenue and mitigate economic harm caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The

American Rescue Plan also provides \$195.3 billion to states and the District of Columbia. \$25.5 billion would be equally divided among the states, providing each state with a minimum of \$500 million. \$169 billion would be allocated based on each states' number of unemployed workers over three months, October through December 2020. The American Rescue Plan also provides \$130.2 billion to local governments; \$65.1 billion for counties, \$45.6 billion for metropolitan cities, and \$19.5 billion for towns with fewer than 50,000 people (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2021).

The funding provided by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 is intended to be used to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and address its economic effects. This includes providing aid to households, small businesses, nonprofits, and industries. The funding should also offer months the premium pay to essential employees, not to exceed \$13 per hour per worker. The funding should also be used for delivering government services that have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, to make investments in water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure. The ARPA specifies explicitly that the funding cannot be used towards pensions or to replenish revenues lost resulting from the tax cut enacted on March 3, 2021 (National State Legislatures, 2021).

COVID-19 Impact on Central Massachusetts

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected nearly every facet of daily life for people across the United States and the globe. Families have lost loved ones, individuals and organizations have lost their livelihoods, and everyone has struggled to live in a world six feet apart from others. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, there have been 635,045 confirmed cases and 17,215 deaths in Massachusetts. In Worcester County, there

have been 74,138 confirmed cases of COVID-19. There have been 20,599,779 COVID-19 tests administered in Massachusetts and 2,123,704 tests administered in Worcester County (Mass.gov). Globally, there have been 157,289,118 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 3,277,272 deaths (World Health Organization, 2021).

From October to November 2020, the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce partnered with the MassHire North Central Massachusetts Workforce Board, Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, and NewVue Communities to conduct a COVID-19 Business Impact Survey. The survey was offered to businesses within the twenty-seven communities located within North Central Massachusetts. A total of 248 responses were received representing businesses in various industries such as health care, manufacturing, retail, food and beverages, financial services, education, and agriculture. The report noted that most 248 businesses that submitted responses would be considered small businesses by federal standards (North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce, 2020).

The survey results found that about 50% of businesses were completely open, about 46% were opened in a limited capacity, and about 4% were completely closed for business. The survey also found that companies were impacted in various facets. Some of the areas affected included operations (65%), unable to source PPE (12.5%), closed due to health/safety protocols (14%), shift in types of products or services offered (27%), a shift in operations (21%), hiring (27%), previously closed (23%), cancellation of projects (43%), decline in customers/clients (51%), and other (18.5%). Lastly, some businesses have been affected to prevent them from ever opening their doors to the public again. For example, the North Central Chamber of Commerce

found that about 30% of businesses would either shut down for good or were unsure if they would be able to reopen.

The Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce found that during the week of March 15, 2020, Massachusetts residents filed almost 150,000 initial unemployment insurance claims. As a result, individuals and employers alike were impacted by the acceleration of the unemployment crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly every industry was affected by this, including accommodation and food service, construction, arts, entertainment, recreation, retail, transportation, warehousing, utilities, manufacturing, health care, social assistance, business services, information services, educational services, financial services, and government (Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, 2020). While not specific to North Central Massachusetts, this is important to note as it was one of the most significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic across Massachusetts and the entire United States.

Due to the pandemic nature of the COVID-19 crisis, mass vaccination sites have been essential in curbing the spread of COVID-19. Mass vaccination sites have been utilized throughout the United States in an effort to get as many people vaccinated as quickly as possible. However, the logistics of operating a mass vaccination site pose many challenges. First, due to the unprecedented number of patients enrolling to receive the vaccine, a system that can efficiently process that enrollment volume is required. Second, a physical location large enough to allow for safe distancing and adherence to the COVID-19 guidelines is required. Lastly, staffing facilities to efficiently intake, vaccinate, and monitor the volume of patients receiving the vaccine (Goralnick, Kaufmann, & Gawande, 2021).

In February 2021, a mass vaccination site was opened at Worcester State University in Central Massachusetts. Initially, the Worcester State site vaccinated several hundred people a day. However, by March, the site was set to begin vaccinating around 2,000 per day. Worcester State partnered with St. Vincent's Hospital to provide clinical and operational leadership. This partnership with a highly regarded medical facility was crucial in the success of the mass vaccination site. At the time of the site's opening, it was one of six mass vaccination sites in Massachusetts, the only one in Central Massachusetts. The other mass vaccination sites are located at Fenway Park and the Reggie Lewis Center in Boston, the Eastfield Mall in Springfield, the DoubleTree Hilton hotel in Danvers, and Gillette Stadium in Foxborough (WCVB, 2021).

Central Massachusetts did the best they could to ensure safety during the early days of the COVID-19. U.S. Representative Lori Trahan and U.S. Senator Ed Markey visited Gardner, Massachusetts' COVID-19 mass vaccination site at the Polish American Citizens Club (PACC) on May 6, 2021. The visit was meant to highlight the relief funding from the American Rescue Plan. But, inherently, the visit also shone a spotlight on the success of the PACC vaccination site located in the heart of Central Massachusetts. State Representative Jonathan Zlotnik stated regarding the clinic, "The Baker administration has made a note of our success here, the efficiency with which it's operated, the positive reaction from people who've gone there to be vaccinated — that's really something that's been spread around the state. So, it's fantastic for (Markey and Trahan) to come here and see it as we're starting the final stage of the vaccine program". This regional collaborative was used as a prime example of a public-private partnership truly succeeding (Landry, 2021).

In addition to mass vaccination sites, Massachusetts has also designated several regional vaccination sites to serve residents of various regions of the state. One of these regional sites is located at Heywood Hospital in Gardner, Massachusetts. The regional vaccination site opened on March 1, 2021, and has the capacity to vaccinate up to 750 individuals per day. This regional vaccination site is another step towards streamlining the response to COVID-19 in Central Massachusetts (O’Laughlin, 2021).

Conclusion: Repurposing a Gateway Into a Roadway for All

The Federal, State, and Municipal coalition in Massachusetts proved that together monstrous projects such as pandemics could be handled by providing allocations of funds to the State that will, in turn, give allocations to individual communities to use on the ground level where they seem fit. This not only worked, but it is the way things should work in Government. This type of environment provides the necessary tax dollars needed to succeed at every level, and is how we fix our roads, fund our schools, and provide regional assistance to those who need it most. So why not provide economic and cultural support through the same means?

The Gateway Cities Initiative is failing to reach significant goals due to several evident facts. The first is that the funds go to limited municipalities and stay there instead of trickling to the outer communities as initially intended. Many communities in Central Massachusetts have witnessed no significant economic or educational standard growth despite having three centrally located Gateway Cities within thirty miles.

MassINC and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts should significantly open the parameters of the Gateway Cities Initiative, allowing more communities with rich industrial histories that are now struggling to find their way in an ever-changing society. Once they are

there, the funds should be allocated based on population and need instead of being expected to find their course based on extensive Boston metrics. This will also build a stronger coalition built on trust and mutual benefit between local Community Development Departments, Chambers of Commerce, MassHIRE, and Educational facilities.

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