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Protecting land and encouraging land stewardship in North Central and Western Massachusetts

To: Gardner Conservation Commission
From: Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust

August 17, 2022

Dear Commissioners,

We wish to add our voices to the many concerned citizens who have already spoken out against the Expansion of the Gardner Sludge Landfill, and ask you not to issue a permit (negative determination) on the Notice of Intent.

Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust has helped to conserve over 36,000 acres in our region. In addition to the many critical benefits that conservation provides to nature, it also ensures that communities have clean air and clean drinking water. Green spaces in urban areas also provide physical and mental health benefits for city residents.

The impacts on the health of your city residents, 78% of which fall under the designation of an environmental justice community, should be a large concern. An environmental justice designation was given to your city because the combined effects of poverty and racial discrimination result in disproportionate impacts of environmental health issues on resident's health.

For 78% of Gardner residents, the environmental impacts of the sludge landfill expansion could be severe. The sludge landfill expansion would increase the amount of air pollution, including particulate matter with pathogenic bacteria, methane, and ground level ozone; all of which could exacerbate chronic respiratory illnesses, like asthma, and could cause respiratory infections. Increased methane emissions, a strong heat absorbing greenhouse gas, could also contribute to localized heating and increase the intensity of heatwaves. There is a consensus with city planners that trees and greenspaces are important to improve environmental and human health outcomes and many urban areas are working to plant as many trees as possible. Yet, this proposed expansion would result in 4.2 acres of trees and greenspace removed from the city of Gardner. This forested area provides health benefits such as walking trails for exercise, which can prevent chronic diseases, and access to nature, which

provides stress reduction and mental health benefits. Water quality could be impacted by runoff from the top of the sludge landfill after heavy rains. Heavy rains are increasing in frequency due to climate change. This is a problem with the current sludge landfill and results in excess nutrients and chemicals released into adjacent wetlands and waterbodies.

Landfills are an outdated way to dispose of sludge waste and have more adverse environmental impacts than other options. This expansion would provide the city only a 17-year solution and is short-sighted with too many potential harms for the residents of Gardner. Residents need access to green spaces, clean air, and clean drinking water, all of which would be negatively impacted by the expansion of the sludge landfill. We strongly encourage the conservation commission to deny this permit so that more sustainable options to dispose of the City's sludge waste can be found.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Emma G. Ellsworth". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "E" and "G".

Emma G. Ellsworth
Executive Director
Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust