

Gateway City Status for Randolph

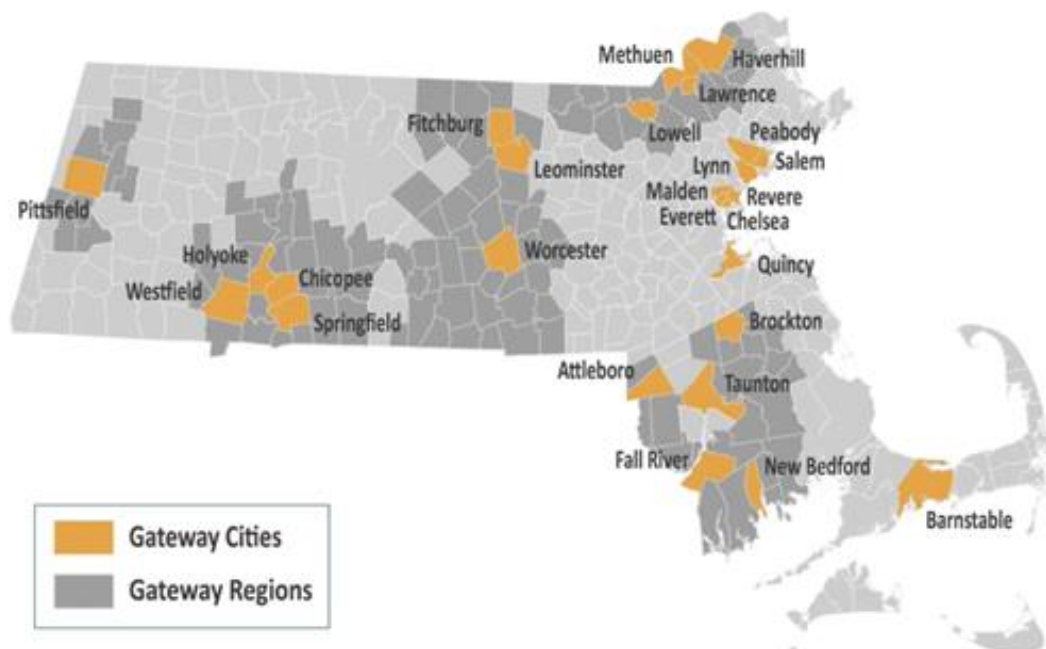
DEI endorsement or veto, please

Randolph has qualified for “Gateway City” status but the process has stalled in the Town Council. I’m asking the DEI to endorse or veto the “Gateway City” resolution – based on this document which addresses all of the issues raised at the previous DEI meeting. If endorsed, I’d bring that to the Town Council to say “Let’s submit a Home Rule Petition” (details below). If vetoed, I’d withdraw my Home Rule Petition from consideration by the Town Council.

I think the DEI should have “veto power” over many Town Council actions, and I’m happy to use the Gateway City issue as the first one. I’ll suggest to the DEI doing the same – endorse or veto – on future Town Council issues. Please read the materials and you can email me back, or email back the group if you want to raise a discussion point, or discuss at the next DEI meeting.

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Introduction

Randolph is a growing small city and in the 2020 census we were counted at 34,984 people. The state “Gateway City” program requires a census count of 35,000, so we set up a plan to show the Census Bureau that they had missed at least 16 people. In July we succeeded, and now the population of Randolph is officially over 35,000 people, and we qualify for “Gateway City” status.

The “Gateway City” program provides grants for small business development, digital equity, home ownership, workforce development, and more – a dozen grants are described below. There are currently 26 communities – that list is below too – which don’t include big cities like Boston, nor wealthy small cities like Braintree.

Unfortunately, all of the “Gateway City” lists were made in 2021, so we have to add Randolph onto those lists, such as <https://massinc.org/our-work/policy-center/gateway-cities/about-the-gateway-cities/> (from MassINC, the think tank who invented “Gateway Cities” in the early 2000s) and on state grant lists such as <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/gateway-city-parks-program> which lists as eligible the 26 Gateway Cities, but not Randolph.

I introduced Town Council Order 2023-024 on May 8, shown in “Proposed Home Rule Petition” below, to start the necessary action to get Randolph onto the eligibility lists. If voted positively by the Randolph Town Council, that would go to the State Legislature and ask them to get Randolph onto all the appropriate lists. This Council Order is what I’m asking the DEI to endorse or veto.

Grants available

Let me start by outlining the benefits of the Gateway City program. In my Town Council introduction in May, I presented details of 6 Gateway City grant recipients in 6 Gateway Cities near Randolph – details for each one appear on the website <http://www.jessejordan.com/gateway.htm#Benefits> – my list below provides an idea of available grants and the programs they fund.

These are all explicitly “Gateway City grants”, i.e. programs only available to municipalities on the Gateway City list. The DEI asked whether other municipalities COULD apply, i.e. if Randolph could get grants like these without getting listed as a Gateway City. So I wrote to a series of grant-makers for grants not yet awarded to ask – the answer was mostly “No, only Gateway Cities can apply, not Randolph” but details below.

Sample Gateway City grant recipients in Gateway Cities near Randolph

- [Attleboro](#): \$2 million from MassDevelopment to double the size of their “Transformative Development Initiative program.”
- [Brockton](#): \$150,000 for school bilingual immersion, including grant-funded courses for teachers at Bridgewater State University
- [Fall River](#): \$290,000 for STEM “Career Academy”, including a five-week intensive summer program
- [New Bedford](#): \$1M Empowerment Grants for Small Business via the New Bedford Economic Development Council
- [Taunton](#): \$60,000 for “Greening the Gateway Cities” in Taunton as part of \$825,703 in grants to support tree plantings in five Gateway Cities

- [Quincy](#): Permanent “Greening” city program to create a new city agency for planting trees (instead of a one-time grant to plant trees like in Taunton)

Are similar grants available to non-Gateway Cities?

I wrote to each of the grant-makers below, all of which are listed as “Gateway City grants” to see if they were available to Randolph without Gateway City status. I include detailed notes in the [supplement attached](#) so you can all see my conversations with the grant-makers. The results:

- [Gateway City Parks Program](#): Your community can receive funding for the creation and restoration of parks and recreational areas. Eligible Applicants: Gateway Cities are eligible to apply [listing the 26 eligible cities]. *\$103 million has been invested in 30 projects in 23 of the 26 Gateway Cities, and they are actively seeking projects in the remaining three.*
- [FY2022: Gateway City Grants for High Quality, Intensive English Language Learning Programs](#): This competitive grant program is open only to eligible applicants in the commonwealth’s 26 Gateway Municipalities. *\$1 million is reserved for Gateway Cities; others can apply for smaller grants.*
- [Greening the Gateway Cities Program: Municipal Partnership Grant](#): Grants to support municipalities as they identify and prepare urban areas for tree planting in coordination with DCR. *Eligible Applicants: Gateway City municipalities where DCR is planting. They may extend to non-Gateway Cities in future years.*
- [TDI Creative Catalyst Grant](#): (Transformative Development Initiative) Creative communities are central to restoring the regional significance of urban neighborhoods in Gateway Cities. *Randolph must ALSO apply to have a TDI District, which we could do!*
- [Grants to Gateway Cities to Establish Community WiFi Hotspots](#): the Massachusetts Broadband Institute is soliciting applications for grant funding from municipal officials *only in eligible Gateway Cities*
- [Housing Development Incentive Program](#) for multi-family housing development under Chapter 40V, with state and/or local tax credits: *Only available for Gateway Cities.*
- [Economic Development Incentive Program](#): Manufacturing development tax credit for Gateway Cities – this isn’t a grant, but a state tax credit for businesses locating in Gateway Cities. *The tax credit is much larger for Gateway Cities*

I’m particularly interested in that first one, the Gateway City Parks Program, because I regularly ask the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) to fund park projects – they usually turn me down because they cost too much. I cite below where the Gateway City Parks Program could be a source of funds for similar Randolph projects which I’ve unsuccessfully tried to fund from other sources. Here’s some examples of what they funded that pertains to Randolph:

- **Attleboro** \$1,580,000 to acquire a key parcel, design, & build a trail & park along the Ten Mile River in downtown Attleboro (*Randolph could connect the two halves of the Reservoir Walk*).
- **Brockton** \$3.8 million to renovate City Hall Plaza following a design produced with a previous grant of \$200,000 (*Randolph could seek funding to renovate the Belcher House to supplement the RWC’s existing partial grants*).
- **Everett** \$30,000 to produce an Open Space & Recreation Plan (OSRP); \$500,000 to renovate Glendale Park; \$235,000 to design & build the Northern Strand Community Trail.

(Randolph has had no OSRP since 2017 which makes us ineligible for many other state grants; the CPC funded a much smaller amount than \$30,000 to produce an OSRP).

- **Haverhill** \$1.7 million to rebuild Swasey Park following a design produced with a prior \$151,000 grant; \$400,000 to acquire 1.1 miles of rail line for a downtown trail. *(The Randolph CPC turned down my proposal to do this same thing on our Old Colony Rail Trail; like Haverhill, we'd need one grant for acquisition and another for rebuilding).*

Bottom line: This particular grant program could fund several much-needed park projects in Randolph which the Town has declined to fund for several years -- but only if we are listed as a Gateway City. The grant-maker referred me to the "[PARC Grant Program](#)," an equivalent smaller program for non-Gateway Cities – but that program requires that Randolph have an OSRP (which we have neglected to update since 2017, and which Everett got funding for above!)

This is an example of structural inequity, and I believe that long-standing institutional inequity like this should be the focus of the DEI. Randolph's Conservation Commission and Community Preservation Commission both acknowledge that Randolph's closed parks should be opened, but they have only limited resources to do so. Those limited resources are why Randolph has neglected to produce an Open Space & Recreation Plan since 2017, which makes us ineligible to apply for additional state funding for the projects that our CPC and ConComm can't fully fund.

That results in "park inequity" with most of Randolph's parks closed to the public and closed to improvements – could you imagine that happening in wealthy communities like Braintree and Canton? The answer is "No; that wouldn't happen in Braintree because Braintree has an OSRP and opens their parks to Braintree residents except where they border Randolph" – I'd like to work with Braintree on several joint park projects because some of their Town Councilors see the inequity in the current situation on access to our joint reservoirs and conservation areas.

And the answer from the latest DCR Blue Hills project is, "No, that never happens in Canton; they will get millions of state dollars to improve their already-beautiful open-to-the-public amenities in the Blue Hills, while Randolph will only get state-funded improvements on the AMC site which serves paying customers from outside of Randolph." Those current situations just scream "inequity!" to me, and I hope the DEI might see it the same way.

The Gateway City program attempts to bypass the structural inequities that small cities like Randolph encounter, by directly funding an updated OSRP, so we can apply for other state grants without the large up-front cost that currently blocks us. And by directly funding projects in parks that have been closed for decades, parks unknown to neighbors of those parks except for fears of getting ticketed by inadvertently violating the abundant "No Dumping" and "No Parking" signs.

Three criteria for eligibility

Let me take a step back and establish Randolph's eligibility for the Gateway City program. This was a contentious issue in previous discussions in the Town Council, on all three criteria:

- 1) **Population exceeding 35,000:** Can an updated census figure apply to make Randolph eligible? And can we establish an updated census figure to the Census Bureau's satisfaction? *(The answer to both is "Yes", and we got the [official letter from the Census Bureau](#) in July 2023. We worked with the UMass Donahue Institute to accomplish this, in conjunction with the Town Clerk's municipal census – this was previously very contentious but is now well-established and accepted).*

- 2) **Educational Attainment below the state median:** Town Councilors asked, “How can anyone know which statistic to use, since there are so many?” The Gateway City program uses the statistic called “[Bachelor’s degree or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+ \(2017-2021 update\)](#)”. I re-confirmed with MassINC that that’s the correct statistic – click on the link above to see it on the Census Bureau’s website. The figures are:

Randolph percent: 30.5%

Statewide percent: 45.2%

My explanation for why Randolph is below the state median is that we are a “city of nurses”, and most nurses have RN/AA degrees or LPN/CNA certificates, not Bachelor’s degrees. That explanation has made this no longer a contentious issue.

- 3) **Median household Income below the state median:** The Gateway City program uses the statistic called “[Median household income \(in 2021 dollars\)](#)” (2017-2021 update)”. I again re-confirmed with MassINC that that’s the correct statistic. The figures are:

Randolph median: \$87,869

Statewide median: \$89,026

We are just below the state median – about the 48th percentile – but this issue remains the most contentious. Most of the rest of this document address issues surrounding the median income, its racial implications, and its stigma.

Statistics on Existing Gateway Cities

Our DEI discussion focused on whether the Gateway City program is targeted toward, or implicitly targets, minority-majority towns like Randolph. The answer is that it explicitly does not – a detailed explanation follows the chart. But let me present the chart first so you can see the statistics for yourself.

All of these are from the same Census Bureau sources as linked above for Randolph, for every Gateway City listed below. Note the following highlighted areas:

- **Randolph would be the smallest Gateway City.** That’s because we’re just barely over the 35,000 population cutoff. I didn’t include the population statistics because this fact is obvious.
- **Randolph would be in the middle of educational attainment for Gateway Cities.** There are many others above our percent attainment, and many below our percent attainment.
- **Randolph would be the wealthiest city in the Gateway City program,** since we’re very close to the cutoff for median household income (about the 48th percentile where the 50th percentile is the cutoff). The next city after us is Methuen, at about the 47th percentile. Quincy is a distant 3rd place.
- **Quincy and Salem are no longer eligible because of high educational attainment.** They have exceeded the state median, but there’s no process to remove them from the list until 2030. This is the same problem Randolph faces in reverse: there’s no process to **ADD** Randolph to the list until 2030.
- **Randolph would have the lowest “White percent” of any Gateway City.** This is also obvious because Randolph is the most diverse community in the Commonwealth, which means the same thing. Note, however, that racial diversity is not a criteria for Gateway City status, as discussed in detail below.
- **Many Gateway Cities exceed the state’s “White percent” demographic** – this is the same thing as saying “racial diversity is not a criteria for Gateway City status” – but 6 Gateway Cities are above the state’s 79% white percent (Attleboro, Barnstable, Peabody, Pittsfield, Salem, and Westfield).
- **Randolph would have the highest “Black/AA percent” of any Gateway City.** Again, this is not a criteria for Gateway City status, but people from Brockton doubt me when I say “Randolph is more diverse than Brockton” so here are the stats.

Race, educational attainment, and median income for all Gateway Cities

Gateway City for demographics	White alone, percent	Black or African American alone, percent	Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2017-2021	Median household income (in 2021 dollars), 2017-2021
Randolph	30.6%	42.4%	30.5%	\$87,869
Massachusetts	79.4%	9.5%	45.2%	\$89,026
Attleboro	85.9%	3.7%	31.7%	\$81,627
Barnstable	83.3%	5.7%	33.7%	\$69,021
Brockton	33.7%	41.0%	20.1%	\$68,067
Chelsea	38.4%	8.0%	20.8%	\$64,782
Chicopee	79.3%	5.5%	22.0%	\$56,509
Everett	48.2%	13.4%	24.4%	\$71,510
Fall River	75.3%	6.8%	15.7%	\$49,613
Fitchburg	73.3%	6.5%	23.7%	\$60,466
Haverhill	74.5%	3.7%	29.8%	\$75,130
Holyoke	72.8%	4.0%	22.0%	\$45,045
Lawrence	37.9%	5.3%	13.5%	\$47,542
Leominster	77.5%	6.6%	31.8%	\$69,525
Lowell	58.2%	9.0%	27.4%	\$64,489
Lynn	49.7%	14.6%	21.0%	\$63,922
Malden	47.9%	15.7%	43.0%	\$77,119
Methuen	65.1%	6.5%	30.0%	\$87,137
New Bedford	60.6%	6.1%	17.0%	\$50,581
Peabody	86.7%	3.4%	34.9%	\$83,570
Pittsfield	83.2%	5.2%	33.0%	\$59,522
Quincy	58.3%	6.1%	45.6%	\$85,041
Revere	66.9%	4.0%	24.5%	\$73,041
Salem	80.9%	5.2%	48.5%	\$72,884
Springfield	52.9%	20.8%	19.5%	\$43,308
Taunton	78.9%	6.9%	22.5%	\$66,787
Westfield	87.6%	1.8%	32.6%	\$73,692
Worcester	64.7%	12.7%	32.2%	\$56,746

Racial demographics were a major discussion in the DEI meeting so I've tried to present all the relevant statistics. The bottom line is that Gateway Cities do not look at race in their criteria, and some Gateway Cities are even more white than the state as a whole. But racial demographics are just not part of this program.

I raised this point in discussion with MassINC, the think tank who invented the Gateway City program. They *WANTED* racial demographics to be part of the criteria, as part of some sort of subjective add-on criteria, but the state legislature turned down that idea. When the legislature initiated the program, they chose the three objective criteria described above, and nothing about racial

demographics. In other words, the legislature *COULD* have chosen to include the 1st or 2nd numeric column in my chart above, but they chose instead to only include the last two columns plus population.

When I spoke with state administrators earlier this year, they described the Gateway City program criteria as “automatic” – there is no administrative body which “decides” in any subjective manner which cities are eligible as Gateway Cities. The Census numbers come out, and the Gateway City list is made from those statistics, objectively and “automatically.”

Stigma

Much of the DEI discussion on Gateway City status focused on the stigma of accepting Gateway City status, in particular by acknowledging that Randolph is below the state median in household income. First, I’d like to address two “stigma arguments” that came up in earlier discussions in Town Council, but not at the DEI, and then introduce the 3rd “stigma argument” and address it in detail:

1) Naysayers assert, “Why would we want to do anything that makes Randolph more like Brockton?” The “stigma” in this argument is the implication that Brockton is a low-income failed city, and has racist undertones. The response is, “Randolph doesn’t need to change anything to qualify for Gateway City grants – we don’t have to become more like Brockton nor less – this is about getting on the list to ask for money for projects that we want.” I have not heard this assertion at DEI meetings, but it has come up at Town Council meetings and probably will again.

2) Naysayers worry like, “Randolph will have to open meth clinics and toxic waste sites if we accept Gateway City status.” These worries are so pervasive that I asked state grant-makers and MassINC about them – all responded by dismissing them as “conspiracy theories” – there are no “secret strings attached” to Gateway City status. In particular, every Gateway City chooses to apply for each grant awarded – if there were ever a grant to help open a meth clinic or toxic waste site, Randolph could choose not to apply. Gateway City status gives us the right to choose which grants we apply for – not any obligation to accept “strings.”

3) The third naysayer argument is, “Why should we have to admit that we’re below the median state income?” I understand that for some people admitting that we’re in the 48th percentile comes with a stigma, but actually we don’t have to “admit” anything, because of the automatic nature of Gateway City status. We have to notify state agencies that we’re eligible, only because we were not eligible based on the data provided by the 2020 Census. If we had been, we would have been notified by the Commonwealth that we had been automatically added to the list – would anyone have opposed Gateway City status under those circumstances last year?

Because the 3rd “stigma argument” occupied much of the discussion at the DEI meeting, I’ll address it in some detail, after conversations with several grant-makers, a BIPOC State Rep (Aaron Vega of Holyoke), MassINC, and state agency representatives.

EJ community

In several conversations, it was suggested that I compare the stigma of Gateway Cities with “EJ Community status.” Randolph is an “EJ Community”, which means we’re eligible to apply for Environmental Justice-targeted grants, and Randolph can claim “EJ Community status” when applying for any grant. [The criteria for an EJ Community](#) are that Randolph meet any one of these criteria:

- Minorities comprise 40 percent or more of the population; *(Every neighborhood of Randolph qualifies on this characteristic except the Blue Hills.)*
- The annual median household income is not more than 65 percent of the statewide annual median household income; *(This is higher than the Gateway City cutoff of 50%, and Randolph qualifies at about 48%. Two neighborhoods in South Randolph qualify for EJ Community status on both “Minority and Income” characteristics)*
- 25 percent or more of households lack English language proficiency *(No neighborhoods in Randolph meet this criteria; our highest is 16% of “Households with language isolation” in North Randolph, with several other nearby neighborhoods close behind, but none near 25%).*

These statistics come from the “[Updated Massachusetts 2020 Environmental Justice Populations](#)” which includes on its “EJ Community map” all of Randolph’s neighborhoods. I have not heard anyone in Randolph complain that there’s a stigma associated with EJ Community status.

Salem Renaissance

The city of Salem got added to the Gateway City list after the 2010 census and encountered much of the same “stigma pushback” as Randolph is now experiencing. They held public meetings to “[explain the Gateway Cities program](#)” to the people of Salem, and got their first grant for \$230,000 in 2013. Salem received the funds under the Gateway Cities Education Agenda, meant to close the achievement gap for poor and immigrant children, and used the grant for a summer program for high school students that will focus on work and career readiness while boosting English language skills.

The Salem Mayor at the time (now Lieutenant Governor) Kim Driscoll dealt with the stigma issues in two ways: 1) She allowed the naysayers to air their grievances, and invited MassINC staff to respond, at public meetings like the one linked above; and 2) she had the City of Salem apply for Gateway City grants despite the naysayers.

We could follow that model in Randolph – naysayers can say what they want to the Town Council on RCTV, to air their grievances and explain why stigma and/or other shortcomings should outweigh millions of dollars of benefits to Randolph. Randolph could also follow Salem’s example of holding a grievance session after receiving our first Gateway City grant, so naysayers can express publicly why they think the stigma outweighs \$230,000 for a summer program for our high schoolers. And MassINC staff would attend meetings if requested, to address concerns with facts instead of rumors.

Mayor Driscoll, in her campaign for Lieutenant Governor, came to Randolph several times and told her story. She focused on her role in Salem’s successful redevelopment, which included the projects funded by Gateway City programs. (Her story also included Salem entering the Green Community program, which I’ll raise in the coming months, and plan on fighting yet more naysayers on different grounds there!)

MassINC goals

MassINC was mentioned above as the think tank that invented the idea of Gateway Cities. They also run the “[Gateway Cities Innovation Institute](#)” as a resource “to unlock the economic potential of small to mid-size regional cities [and to] help Gateway City leaders develop and advance a shared policy agenda.” That means they would help Randolph get started on applying for Gateway City grants – to overcome the Randolph naysayers who complain about the expense of hiring grant-writers. Randolph currently gets some grant-writing assistance from MAPC, our regional planning commission – MassINC would serve a similar role.

MassINC emphasizes equity issues in their [copious literature promoting Gateway Cities](#), such as these topics, all of which have associated grants available:

- Close ethnic gaps in small business ownership
- Apply diversity in municipal spending
- Digital equity in gateway cities
- School integration
- Closing gaps in college application rates by ethnicity
- Home ownership and closing racial gaps in home ownership
- Neighborhood stabilization with new minority ownership

This section comes primarily from interviews with MassINC staffperson Ben Forman, and former State Rep. Aaron Vega of Holyoke, who participated in Holyoke's Gateway City grants as Holyoke's Economic Development Director.

Summary

This report attempts to address the concerns raised by the Randolph DEI about joining the Gateway City program. I've tried to address the questions from the previous DEI discussions – if the DEI would like to pose additional questions, and/or how a supplemental report might address those concerns better than my limited ability here, that could be the purpose of the next DEI discussion.

I communicated with a dozen people to produce this report – I'm open to another round of interviews if DEI wants to suggest more topics. I asked all of the grant-makers and others about the stigma issues. One response was from a representative of a public-private organization that funds Gateway City projects – in 2024, I'd like to apply for Randolph's "Transformative Development Initiative status" too (TDI status is only available for Gateway Cities). I think his is the best response, acknowledging the negative perception but focusing on the positives:

"I think the negative rumors will always be present, regardless if a city is designated as a Gateway City or not, but that perception should not deter a community from addressing community & economic development related goals. Our approach to economic development is viewed more as 'farming' (cultivating leaders, capacity, and stakeholders from the community to positions of leadership to undertake work beyond TDI's designated term) rather than 'fishing' (ex: courting a big box distribution center). I think we have been successful in kick starting significant work, boosting momentum of active work – through funding capacity, etc. – and elevating stakeholders into leadership roles."

-- Alejandro Lopez, TDI Program Manager at MassDevelopment, ALopez@massdevelopment.com

Proposed Home Rule Petition

Section E, Item 1.

Order 2023-024

Introduced By: Councilor Jesse Gordon
May 8, 2023

Authorization By The Randolph Town Council
To Petition The General Court To Enact Special Legislation Regarding
The Status of The City Known As The Town Of Randolph
As A Gateway Municipality

The Randolph Town Council hereby authorizes a petition to the General Court to enact special legislation regarding the status of the City Know As The Town of Randolph as a Gateway Municipality, said special legislation to be in a form that is substantially as presented below, and authorizes the Town Manager to take any action necessary in connection with the submission of said petition, and further authorizes the General Court to make clerical or editorial changes of form to the proposed special legislation:

AN ACT RELATIVE TO THE STATUS OF THE CITY KNOWN AS THE TOWN OF RANDOLPH AS A GATEWAY MUNICIPALITY.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

SECTION 1. As used in this act, the following words shall have the following meanings unless the context clearly requires otherwise:-

“Gateway municipality”, a municipality with a population greater than 35,000 and less than 250,000 with a median household income below the commonwealth’s average and a rate of educational attainment of a bachelor’s degree or above that is below the commonwealth’s average, as defined in section 3A of chapter 23A of the General Laws.

“Town”, the city known as the town of Randolph.

SECTION 2. Notwithstanding section 3A of chapter 23A of the General Laws or any other general or special law to the contrary, the town shall henceforth be deemed a gateway municipality for all purposes under the General Laws.

SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon its passage.

Approved _____.