

INTRODUCTION

As with every entity, from the largest governmental and private organizations, to the individual family unit, the need to plan for the effective use of available resources is paramount. Without planning and structure, the chances of optimizing the best and highest value of human, natural and capital resources is diminished. In the case of small towns that have large amounts of undeveloped land (such as Westminster), a plan for managing future growth is essential. It is a fact of life that communities grow, and there are a number of factors that can spur such growth: new economic development and/or new highways and interchanges, which often result in additional population and housing units. New development activity spurs the need for additional services: schools, infrastructure, fire, police, etc. Westminster town planners have recognized the need for a community Master Plan in order to help local officials act in concert on a common agenda for the long-range development of the Town.

Chapter 41, Section 81-D of Massachusetts General Laws states that a community Master Plan shall be “a basis for decision making regarding the long-term physical development of the municipality.” It further states that such a plan “...identifies the goals and policies of the municipality for its future growth and development.” In a practical sense, community Master Plans have always been intended to serve as a land use and future development policy guide for local decision makers. Typically, a community Master Plan does five things:

- Articulates the goals and objectives of the community (i.e., what the community wants for its future, what type of community it wants to be);
- Outlines the existing resources and conditions of a community (this is usually done through a review of existing data sources, collection of new data, and updates of inventory information);
- Evaluates and assesses the existing resources and conditions with an eye towards identifying shortfalls and deficiencies;
- Projects the current trends and conditions into the future in an effort to identify shortcomings that can be corrected through advanced planning, as well as the future needs of the community;
- Sets forth a strategy for addressing the needs of the community and helping the community become what it wants to be.

Although a community Master Plan has the latitude to deal with a variety of issues and concerns, there are several subjects that such a plan must address by law. Chapter 41, Section 81-D states that community Master Plans must contain the following elements: a goals and policies statement; a land use plan; chapters that deal with economic development, traffic circulation, natural resources, open space and recreation, community services and facilities; and an implementation plan. Each chapter of the Master Plan was assembled in three phases:

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

- 1) Data & Analysis: where are you at, how did you get there, and where do the trends point for the future?
- 2) Goals & Objectives: an expression of what you want for the Town's future (10 to 20 year time horizon).
- 3) Recommendations: the steps you need to take to get to where you want to go.

This community Master Plan for the Town of Westminster sets forth the community's goals and provides the background data and analysis necessary for developing strategies to employ when guiding the Town as it continues to grow and develop over the coming decades.

The Master Planning Process in Westminster: The Master Plan was prepared by the Westminster Master Plan Committee, which was appointed by the Board of Selectmen with input from the Planning Board. A conscious effort was made to have the Committee's membership reflect the broad array of interests in Westminster. The Master Plan Committee was formed in the fall of 2011 and the following Westminster residents have served on the Committee.

Current Members:

Mike Fortin ~ Planning Board Representative
Jon Wyman – Planning Board Alternate
Richelle Brown ~ Open Space Committee Representative
Heather Billings ~ Energy Advisory Committee and Selectmen's Representative
Dean Johnson – Agricultural Committee Representative
ML Altobelli – Alternate Agricultural Committee Representative
Donna Brownell ~ WEST Representative
Lois Luniewicz – West Alternate
Scott Ryder ~ DPW Representative
Mike Gallant ~ Building Commissioner
Ted Fiffy – Citizen at Large
Linda Wiest ~ Citizen at Large
Laila Michaud – Citizen at Large

Former Members:

Dan Barkus – Conservation Commission
Bud Taylor – Planning Board Alternate

The Committee's first order of business was to quiz the citizens about how they felt about the Town and what they wanted for the Town's future. A Master Plan citizen survey was sent to every household in Westminster (approximately 2,630 households) in January of 2012. The survey included twenty-one questions covering such topics as land use, zoning, housing, economic development, open space, recreation, and municipal services. There were 1,222 responses received for a total response rate of 46.5%. The survey results have informed the Master Plan Committee's deliberations as they prepared the Plan's goals, objectives and recommendations. The survey results can be found here: http://www.westminster-ma.gov/pages/WestminsterMA_BComm/Master/Master%20Plan%20Citizen%20Survey

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

There were a number of public forums held during the three-year master planning process, including:

- A project kick-off forum held on February 9, 2012 where open space and recreation were topics of conversation. Participants went through an exercise to determine the Town's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
- An economic summit held on January 23, 2013 where local officials, residents and business owners heard presentations from our State and regional economic development partners.
- Two public forums were held for the preparation of the Open Space & Recreation chapter: May 7, 2013 to kick off the effort, and March 4, 2014 when the chapter was completed.
- A Town Center Design Workshop was held on April 12, 2014 where residents provided input on what they would like the Town Center to look like in the future. Assistance with this workshop was provided by a team of graduate students from the UMass-Amherst Center for Economic Development. It should be noted that the Town received a \$10,000 grant from the MA Department of Housing and Community Development's Downtown Initiative Program to prepare a plan to implement the public preference that came out of the workshop.
- A final public forum was held on October 15, 2014 to present a full draft of the Master Plan to the public and to review the Plan's goals, objectives and recommendations.

Details for all of the Master Plan public forums can be found here: http://www.westminster-ma.gov/pages/WestminsterMA_BComm/Master/Master%20Plan%20Public%20Forums.pdf

During the initial stages of the Master Plan's preparation, interviews were conducted with all key municipal committees, boards, commissions and personnel. Everyone contacted was very helpful in terms of assisting with the update of inventory information, identifying upcoming needs, and providing candid assessments of the challenges they face. The Master Plan Committee reviewed this input in detail and is very grateful for the assistance rendered.

The Master Plan Committee met on a monthly basis and all meetings were open to the public. Several joint meetings were held with some of the Town's municipal boards and committees including the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Parks & Recreation Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, Department of Public Works, Historical Commission, Open Space Committee, Agricultural Commission, Capital Planning Committee, Advisory Board, and other municipal department heads. Interested citizens also stopped by on a regular basis to provide their input.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

Two chapters were joint efforts: the Economic Development chapter was a joint effort of the Master Plan Committee and the Economic Development Committee. The Open Space & Recreation chapter was a joint effort between the Master Plan Committee and the Open Space Committee with input from the Agricultural Commission, Parks and Recreation Commission and Historical Commission.

The Master Plan Committee received a great deal of input from public officials, municipal staff, local businesses and citizens, which indicates that all the stakeholders in Westminster care very deeply about the Town and its future. We hope this 2014 Master Plan truly represents the desires of the citizens and that our recommended plan of action will enable Westminster to reach its goals, making a great town even better.