

# **WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014**

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## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CHAPTER**



This chapter was a joint effort of the Master Plan Committee and Economic Development Committee and was completed in early 2013.



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## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### Overview:

Westminster's local economy cannot be viewed as an independent entity on its own. Rather, the local economy is part of a larger regional economy, which is part of the State, national, and global economy. Trends impact on the various sectors of the economy and throughout all levels, from global to local. The reader should bear this in mind when reviewing the data presented below.

### The Regional Economy and Manufacturing:

In the spring of 2008, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) prepared a detailed analysis of employment trends in North Central Massachusetts. This study, North Central MA Workforce Development Strategies Plan, was prepared for the North Central MA Economic Development Council and served as the foundation for the North Central Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board's Strategic Plan 2009 – 2012, published in September 2008. The MIT study evaluated the employment sectors of 26 communities in North Central Massachusetts, identified trends and noted sectors in need of assistance.

According to the MIT study, manufacturing has been in decline at the national, state, regional and local levels for some time now; however, it still remains the second largest employment sector in North Central MA, and remains a significant component of the region's heritage. In 2008, North Central MA had approximately 20% of its employment in the manufacturing sector, tied with the Lower Merrimack Valley region for the highest percentage of its regional employment in manufacturing within the Commonwealth. Manufacturing is also still the fourth largest employment sector in Massachusetts overall, only behind health care, education and retail. The manufacturing sector is also linked to other sectors of the economy including knowledge and innovation.



The MIT study found that more towns lost jobs (16) than gained jobs (9), most of the towns that gained jobs were in the western portion of the region, and many of the job losses occurred in the manufacturing sector. However, it should be noted that other regions in the State have fared even worse in terms of job losses in the manufacturing sector. Between 2000 and 2006, the North Central region lost 16% of its manufacturing jobs, while the Boston region lost 37% and the Lower Merrimack region lost 28%.

The trends identified in the MIT study have continued since 2008 and the recent 2010 US Census bears this out. According to the 2010

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US Census, the 22 towns that comprise the region served by the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) hosted approximately 102,000 jobs as of 2010. This is a loss of 5,000 jobs since 2000, mostly in the manufacturing sector (this after a decade of job growth in the 1990s). This is indicative of a struggling regional economy.

However, there are signs of an improving manufacturing sector, at least on the national level. According to the Price Waterhouse Cooper's Real Estate Investor Survey for the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2012, "Strong occupancy gains have been reported in several industrial markets across the country recently. As a result, the US industrial sector is expected to gain strength over the next few years, pushing more stock into the recovery and expansion phases of the cycle through 2014." This cannot happen soon enough for the North Central region, which lost approximately 3,000 manufacturing jobs during the last decade.

In terms of job gains, they have occurred in the services and public administration sector, which includes a number of job categories such as: food services, lodging services, professional and technical services, government services, medical services, social services and general administrative services. This has been the fastest growing sector of the regional economy for the past 40 years and now stands as the region's largest employment sector, accounting for approximately 46% of the region's total jobs. Unfortunately, these service and public administration jobs do not pay as well as manufacturing jobs. Manufacturing jobs are high paying: such jobs accounted for 33% of all earnings in the region in 2007, while representing just 18% of the region's jobs (MIT study).

Looking towards the future, the MIT study identified the following emerging industries for the North Central region: biotechnology, medical device manufacturing, alternative/sustainable energies, health care and social services. With the exception of health care and social services, these emerging industries have the potential to pay much higher wages than the services and public administration sector.

### Westminster's Labor Force:

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development is the State entity that keeps track of the State's labor force, the employed, unemployed, and tracks the number of jobs in a community by economic sector. This next discussion looks at the number of Westminster residents that are employed and unemployed.

A few things to note when looking at the data presented in Table ED-1: The yearly numbers are estimates and are not seasonally adjusted; rather they are 12-month averages of the estimates prepared for each month of the year. Also, the table does not include those people who aren't participating in the labor force. Much like the federal unemployment numbers, the people who have left the labor force or have given up looking for work are not counted until they start applying for work again.

The number of employed Westminster residents has been in decline since 2007, and the Town has actually lost 224 employed residents since the turn of the century. With the Town's population growing by 5.3% during the last decade, one would expect a corresponding increase

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in the Town's labor force; however, this did not occur. A look at the county-wide data reveals a similar phenomenon. One possible explanation is that a significant number of people stopped looking for jobs that just weren't there and dropped out of the labor force. One would expect to see an increase in the Town's labor force during the next few years as the nationwide economic recovery continues.

The next table presents the number of employed/unemployed Westminster residents dating back to 2000. The table also allows for a comparison of Westminster's unemployment rate with the Worcester County and State unemployment rates.

**Table ED-1  
Employment Status of Westminster Residents**

Year	Total Westminister Labor Force	Employed	Unemployed	Westminister Unemployment Rate	Worcester County Unemployment Rate	State Rate
2000	3,757	3,649	108	2.9%	2.8%	2.6%
2001	3,780	3,638	142	3.8%	3.9%	3.7%
2002	3,869	3,636	233	6.0%	5.6%	5.3%
2003	3,895	3,645	250	6.4%	6.2%	5.8%
2004	3,871	3,641	230	5.9%	5.6%	5.2%
2005	3,857	3,635	222	5.8%	5.2%	4.8%
2006	3,911	3,693	218	5.6%	5.1%	5.0%
2007	3,887	3,691	196	5.0%	4.9%	4.5%
2008	3,868	3,642	226	5.8%	5.8%	5.1%
2009	3,819	3,473	346	9.1%	9.0%	8.2%
2010	3,799	3,451	348	9.2%	9.1%	8.3%
2011	3,738	3,425	305	8.2%	8.1%	7.4%

Source: Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development.

### Where Westminister Residents Work:

At one time, the US Census Bureau compiled workplace origin/destination statistics for every community as part of once-a-decade national census effort. Although such information was not collected for the 2010 US Census, the 2000 Census data does provide some insight, albeit dated, as to where Westminister residents work.

In Westminister:	648 (18.9% of workforce)
Fitchburg:	521 (15.2%)
Leominster:	422 (12.3%)
Gardner:	329 (9.6%)
Worcester:	271 (7.9%)
Boston:	97 (2.8%)

It is interesting to note that only 2.8% of the Town's workforce travels to Boston for work, especially when one considers that a new MBTA commuter rail station (Wachusett Station) is being built in Fitchburg very close to the Westminister borderline.

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## Getting to Work:

Using data from the 2000 and 2010 iterations of the US Census Survey, a comparison can be made as to how Westminster's workforce gets to work and how its commuting patterns have changed during the past decade.

	<u>2000</u>	<u>2010</u>
Drove Alone	94.8%	78.5%
Car-Pooled	7.2%	8.7%
Walk/Bike	0.8%	1.2%
Public Transit	0.1%	1.3%
Worked at Home	3.5%	10.3%

Reviewing the figures above, it is interesting to note that the “driving to work alone” category was the only one to decline over the past decade, while the others (car-pool, walking/biking, public transit and working at home) all increased. Clearly, the trend is moving towards alternative means to get to work other than driving alone. It will be interesting to see how much the presence of the new Wachusett Station impacts the “public transit” figure during the next decennial census in 2020.

## The Number and Types of Jobs in Westminster:

The next set of numbers is also from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development and chronicles the number of jobs residing in Westminster (in-town jobs) as of 2011. A few things to note for Table ED-2: they are annual averages and not seasonally adjusted, the numbers are real jobs reported by the employer themselves, they count *all* jobs whether full-time or part-time, they do not count the self-employed and those businesses that consist solely of members from a single family (like a family-owned farm). Also note that the industry categories are based on the North American Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) system.



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**Table ED-2**

**2011 Average In-Town Employment and Wages  
by Industry All Ownership**

Industry	Establish- ments	Total Wages	Average Employment	Average Weekly Wage
<b>Total, All Industries</b>	206	\$128,720,839	2,533	\$977
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	4	\$330,386	13	\$489
Construction	37	\$5,202,374	123	\$813
Manufacturing	15	\$35,948,298	600	\$1,152
Wholesale Trade	13	\$3,878,419	73	\$1,022
Retail Trade	15	\$2,549,842	98	\$500
Transportation and Warehousing	8	\$1,160,515	28	\$797
Finance and Insurance	5	\$504,091	12	\$808
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	5	\$181,141	17	\$205
Professional and Technical Services	10	\$759,040	24	\$608
Administrative and Waste Services	12	\$1,787,212	52	\$661
Health Care and Social Assistance	15	\$4,493,505	108	\$800
Accommodation and Food Services	16	\$4,044,811	263	\$296
Other Services, Ex. Public Admin	31	\$1,180,246	72	\$315

Source: MA Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD).

For Table ED-2, please note that Westminster’s total in-town jobs figure is listed under the “Total, All Industries” heading, and then the table presents job counts for the major employment categories, but not all employment categories. Thus, the job numbers in the employment categories will not add up to Westminster’s total number of in-town jobs.

The previous table indicates there were 2,533 jobs in Westminster as of 2011. While, this represents a 30% decrease since 2000 when there were 3,640 jobs existing in Westminster, these numbers are a bit misleading. Just because the numbers technically show that Westminster “lost” jobs in the past decade, this does not necessarily mean that these jobs simply disappeared and went away. Westminster is home to several companies that have a national presence: Aubuchon Hardware, TRW Automotive, and Tyco. National companies often shift jobs around from one region to another and this partially explains Westminster’s job “losses” of the last decade. This is particularly true in the case of Tyco. According to the company’s annual report to the Town as part of its Tax Increment Financing (TIF) agreement, Tyco hosted 1,508 jobs at its Westminster location in 2002, but the number of jobs dropped to 722 jobs by 2011. Thus, the bulk of the Town’s job “losses” can be tied to this one employer. Again, these jobs didn’t just disappear, but were moved to other Tyco locations throughout the country. It should be noted that the State rescinded the Company’s TIF agreement in 2011 because it did not meet its hiring targets.

Another factor partly responsible for Westminster’s job “losses” is that the number of Westminster residents who worked from home jumped from 3.5% in 2000 to 10.3% in 2010. The State would not count those people working from home in Table ED-2. Because of the way that the State counts in-town jobs and the increase in the number of work-at-home jobs during the last decade, Westminster has approximately 230 in-town jobs that the State isn’t counting.

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Westminster has always welcomed those businesses and industries that offer living wage jobs and has so far resisted siren song of big box retailers and chain restaurants (the downtown Subway and Dunkin Donuts not withstanding). On two occasions during the last decade, Town Meeting voters have said “no” to large-scale retail operations that were proposed to be located in close proximity to Route 2. In terms of retail development, the results of the Master Plan citizen survey indicate that Westminster residents prefer locally owned businesses located in the Town Center.

While the Town may have technically “lost” some of its manufacturing jobs, other manufacturers in Town continue to grow and expand, such as Ranor Inc., a manufacturer of industrial-scale chambers and vessels. The Townspeople are very aware they have two large industrial districts (Simplex Drive and the Westminster Business Park) that are ripe for industrial development which pays much better wages than retail development. There are still 114 acres of vacant developable land off of Simplex Drive and 249 acres in the Westminster Business Park. The Park is currently under construction and may require another 20 years to complete. The Park owners are essentially turning a gravel pit into a pad-ready industrial park with full infrastructure. Once complete, the Park is permitted to host approximately 1.5 million square feet of new floor space which, if used for industrial purposes, could host over 700 new jobs.

The table below allows for a comparison of the types and number of in-town jobs for Westminster and its neighbors as of 2011.

**Table ED-3  
Number of In-Town Jobs by Employment Major Category - Year 2011 Comparison**

	<b>Westminster</b>	Ashburnham	Hubbardston	Princeton	Gardner	Leominster	Fitchburg
Agri/Forest/Fish	13	0	0	0	0	0	0
Construction	123	36	43	21	112	610	413
Manufacturing	600	29	49	14	1,053	2,580	1,676
Wholesale/Retail	171	129	39	14	1,193	4,602	1,992
Transpo/Warehouse	28	0	0	19	172	319	562
Finance/Real Estate	29	14	0	23	362	970	573
Professional/Admin.	76	25	22	8	275	1,343	737
Health Care/Social/ Education	108	69	59	47	3,230	3,059	3,960
Food/Lodging	263	106	26	93	785	2,216	1,295
Other Services	72	44	30	52	850	942	974
Total # of Establishments	206	124	75	81	525	1,270	1,031
Total In-Town Jobs	2,533	984	500	863	8,053	17,621	12,430
Total Annual Wages Paid	\$128.7 million	\$39.0 million	\$15.3 million	\$19.6 million	\$317.7 million	\$657.0 million	\$492.6 million

Source: MA Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD).

Please note that as with Table ED-2, Table ED-3 does not list every employment category in existence, just the major employment categories. Further, the major employment categories do not capture every single job in each town. For instance, Table ED-3 doesn’t list any jobs for Westminster’s neighbors in the agriculture/forestry/fishing category; however, such jobs most certainly do exist in these communities. Tables ED-2 and ED-3 represents the State’s best estimate as to the number of in-town jobs for Westminster and its neighbors. Again, Table ED-3 does not include the self-employed or family-owned businesses where all employees are members of the family.

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The previous table indicates that Westminster has more in-town jobs, establishments and a larger average payroll than its three rural neighbors, but less than its three urban neighbors. The MIT study documents that Westminster is one of the few towns in the region where average weekly wages nearly double between 2000 and 2007, whereas the average weekly wages actually declined during this time in the region's three major employment centers: Fitchburg, Gardner and Leominster. This indicates that Westminster has a healthy number of businesses and industries for a small rural community and has been meeting its stated goal of hosting living wage jobs.

### In-Town Job Projections:

MRPC's most recent Regional Transportation Plan (2012) uses the MassHighway Traffic Demand Model to forecast the number of residents and in-town jobs for each of their 22 member communities up to the year 2035. According to the most recent forecast, Westminster can expect to have 7,480 residents and 2,490 in-town jobs by the year 2020, and 7,850 residents and 2,580 in-town jobs by 2035. These forecasts indicate that current trend of having Westminster's population grow faster than the number of in-town jobs will continue into the foreseeable future.

### Westminster's Largest Employers:

Westminster's four largest employers include:

- *Tyco*: Located at 50 Technology Drive in the Simplex Drive industrial district, this manufacture of security/alarm systems employs approximately 722 people.
- *TRW Automotive Inc.*: Located at 180 State Road East, this manufacturer of plastic fasteners employs approximately 200 people.
- *W.E. Aubuchon Inc.*: Located at 95 Aubuchon Drive just off West Main Street, this corporate office for the regional chain of hardware stores employs approximately 150 people.
- *Ranor Inc.*: Located at 1 Bella Drive off Town Farm Road, this manufacturer of metal enclosures for the defense/medical/energy industries employs approximately 150 people.

The job counts include both full-time and part-time jobs. The five employers listed above account for approximately 45% of the jobs in Westminster.

There are three other entities in Westminster that employ large numbers of people:

- Westminster and Princeton share one of the region's largest employers and recreation destinations, the Wachusett Mountain Ski Area, which employs approximately 1,200 people, mostly part-time employees working seasonally (the winter).

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- *Ashburnham-Westminster Regional School District:* The District operates two schools in Westminster (the Elementary School and the Meetinghouse School), which employ approximately 80 full-time staff and 30 part-time staff.
- *Town of Westminster:* The Town government employs approximately 70 full-time staff and 90 part-time staff.

### Economic Sector's Contribution to the Local Tax Base:

In fiscal year 2012, Westminster levied a total of \$14,442,097 in taxes, based on a local tax rate of \$17.24 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation. Residential property taxes accounted for approximately 81% of the total 2012 tax base, while property taxes from businesses and industries accounted for approximately 13% of the tax base. The remainder (6%) was derived from taxes on personal property. The next table compares Westminster's economic tax base with its adjacent neighbors.

**Table ED-4  
2012 Commercial & Industrial Tax Base Comparison**

Community	FY 2012 Tax Rate	Commercial Taxes Levied	Industrial Taxes Levied	Comm./Ind. As % of Total Taxes
<b>Westminster</b>	\$17.24	\$994,678	\$919,780	13.2%
Ashburnham	\$18.34	\$251,420	\$87,520	3.2%
Hubbardston	\$12.70	\$190,313	\$86,105	5.0%
Princeton	\$16.84	\$90,982	\$27,185	1.6%
Leominster	\$16.67	\$6,481,750	\$3,235,490	19.0%
Gardner	\$16.72	\$5,181,304	\$3,235,490	19.1%
Fitchburg	\$17.62/\$23.32*	\$1,797,950	\$1,037,861	14.4%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue. Tax rate is per \$1,000 of assessed valuation.

\* City of Fitchburg has a split tax rate: \$17.62 for residences, and \$23.32 for businesses/ industries.

Westminster having more than 10% of its tax base consisting of commercial/industrial taxes is an indication that the Town is not a bedroom community (generally defined as those communities having less than 10% of its tax base consisting of commercial/industrial taxes), and the Town has a strong economic base when compared to its rural neighbors. That is the good news.

The bad news is that Westminster's economic tax base as a percentage of the total tax base has been in decline for the past twenty years. In 1990, commercial/industrial taxes accounted for 19.2% of the Town's total tax base. By 2000, this figure had declined to 16.6% of the total tax base. At present, commercial/industrial taxes account for 13.2% of the Town's total tax base. The decline of the Town's economic tax base should not be interpreted as Westminster losing businesses; in fact, the number of business establishments in Town has been steadily increasing during the past decade. Rather, it simply means that residential development has increased at a faster rate than economic development. This is true of Westminster's neighbors as well, indicating a regional phenomenon.

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### State and Regional Economic Goals:

In early 2011, the Massachusetts Secretary of Housing and Economic Development led a 34-member council of representatives from the public and private sector to create an economic development and strategic plan for the State of Massachusetts. This report entitled, Choosing to Compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, was published in December 2011 and can be found here: [http://www.westminster-ma.gov/pages/WestminsterMA\\_BComm/EDC/MA\\_ED\\_Plan2011.pdf](http://www.westminster-ma.gov/pages/WestminsterMA_BComm/EDC/MA_ED_Plan2011.pdf)

The Plan set forth the following economic development priorities for the State:

#### -- Education

- Advance education and workforce development for middle-skill jobs through coordination of education, economic development, and workforce development programs.
- Design and develop a cohesive, coordinated workforce development system with clear leadership.
- Improve responsiveness of workforce programs for business and workers that will meet the demands of the marketplace.
- Prioritize goals for the State STEM Plan (science, technology, engineering and math) that align with middle-skill jobs.

#### -- Innovation

- Support innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Strengthen and support the State's innovation community.
- Build and retain talent for the innovation economy.
- Expand the State's culture of innovation.
- Support growth to scale.

#### -- Infrastructure

- Support regional economic development through infrastructure investments and local empowerment.
- Make public infrastructure investments that support regional growth opportunities.
- Create regional and local economic development teams led by municipal officials who are "CEOs for Economic Development".
- Educate regional and local officials, municipal leaders and their staffs.
- Empower municipal leaders and their staffs with more local input and control.

#### -- Ease of Doing Business

- Engage in ongoing state regulatory review.
- Re-align business development efforts.
- Market the strengths of doing business in Massachusetts.

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### -- Address our Competiveness

- Contain the increasing cost of health care while protecting access and quality.
- Reduce energy costs while creating a diversified energy portfolio that balances competitive pricing with sustainability.
- Manage the impact on business of long-term cost pressures within State and local government.
- Make the tax structure more simple, competitive, and predictable by addressing the use of tax-based business incentives.

In October 2009, the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) prepared a document entitled, Building a Better Montachusett, ([http://www.westminster-ma.gov/pages/WestminsterMA\\_BComm/Master/FINAL\\_CEDS\\_2009.pdf](http://www.westminster-ma.gov/pages/WestminsterMA_BComm/Master/FINAL_CEDS_2009.pdf)) which represents the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and Five-Year Work Plan. The key findings of this report include:

- Within the 22-town Montachusett Region, the highest concentrations of employment by industry were in the services-public administration sector (45.7% of the labor force), manufacturing (24.4%), wholesale and retail trade (15%), construction (5.9%) and finance-insurance-real estate (5%).
- Notable job losses have occurred in the manufacturing, transportation-communications-utilities, wholesale and retail trade, and finance-insurance-real estate sectors.
- Job losses in the manufacturing sector have been attributed to the shift in manufacturing out of the United States and into those nations expanding their manufacturing base.
- While the manufacturing sector lost 4,709 jobs between 1990 and 2000, the percentage of manufacturing jobs in the region (24.4%) remains higher than the State percentage (12.8%) and the national average (14.1%).
- A significant gain in jobs occurred in the services-public administration sector.
- The region's unemployment rate has been higher than the State rate from 1994 through 2008.
- New types of manufacturing jobs are anticipated in relation to markets yet to emerge and products related to electronics, biotechnology and nanotechnology.
- The types of service sector jobs that are growing can be found in the health care and hospitality sectors.
- New job growth in the region has not kept up with the growth in population.

The CEDS report outlined nine economic development goals for the Montachusett Region to pursue:

- Utilize the current MRPC framework to coordinate community economic development and encourage cooperation among all entities.
- Upgrade the region's transportation system.
- Preserve existing housing and develop new opportunities for affordable housing.
- Strengthen and expand the region's business center.
- Support and promote efficient public and private strategies for waste management throughout the region.

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- Support, improve and promote locally-based community health systems.
- Develop and support a strong educational and training system that prepares the region's diverse population for employment.
- Work towards full employment opportunities for area residents that will provide incomes sufficient to sustain families.
- Strengthen business district revitalization efforts within Montachusett Region communities.

In the spring of 2008, the North-Central Massachusetts Economic Development Council (NCEDC) prepared a Workforce Development Strategic Plan, with the assistance of Urban Studies and Planning Department from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The Plan identified the North-Central Massachusetts Region as having the following characteristics:

- The region has an overall trend of job losses.
- Economic development at the regional level is uneven, with greater economic strength in the more eastern portion of the region and slower development in the western towns.
- Wages are falling or stagnant in the region's big cities, with greater job loss occurring in higher paying jobs and a gain in lower paying jobs.
- There are low levels of education attainment amongst the region's workforce.
- Manufacturing continues to be important to the region, despite the decline in the number of manufacturing firms and jobs.

The Study (<http://www.ncmwib.org/docs/mitstudy08.pdf>) identified the following impediments to workforce development in the North-Central Massachusetts Region:

- There is a lack of coordination amongst the local workforce training programs.
- Funding for workforce development is limited and narrowly targeted.
- The region lacks organizational capacity for assessing workforce needs.
- Information on workforce training options and services is not easily accessible.
- There is a need for higher-skilled workers.

The Study identified the following as emerging industries that will require workforce training: biotechnology, medical device manufacturing, alternative and renewable energy production, and health care and social assistance.

The Plan concludes with a five-point strategy for improving the region's workforce development systems:

- Establish a strong workforce development intermediary (i.e., partnerships between educational institutions, social service agencies, labor groups, the business community, and government).
- Expand awareness of and information on available training options.
- Organize industry-wide training initiatives.
- Create a manufacturing career ladder training system.
- Secure immediate and long-term funding sources for workforce training.

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In 2007, Westminster commissioned Dr. John Mullin of Mullin Associates Inc. to prepare a report on behalf of the Town's Economic Development Study Committee, which was tasked with evaluating the potential of the commercial districts along Route 2. The report, entitled: Final Report of the Economic Development Study Committee: Westminster's Future Economic Development Opportunities (also known as "The Mullins Report"), set forth the following findings:

- The Route 2 Corridor represents Westminster's primary gateway to distant points and reflects Westminster's historic, cultural and rural values.
- The Corridor has tremendous potential for industrial development and low-density commercial development.
- The Corridor, in terms of industrial growth, will grow very slowly: large-scale growth will be largely blocked by Devens while infill development is most likely to occur in nearby Fitchburg, Leominster and Gardner.
- There is demand for large-scale commercial development.
- It was the consensus of the Committee that large-scale commercial development would change the character of the corridor.
- Based on a fiscal impact analysis, the Corridor has the potential to replace the lost revenue from the Landfill's eventual closure.
- While the Corridor has the potential to be developed, it is essential that its assets be marketed.
- While the Corridor's zoning does currently protect the Town from large-scale commercial development, it does not in itself ensure that other forms of development will match the Town's character.

The Mullins report can be found here:

[http://www.westminster-ma.gov/pages/WestminsterMA\\_BComm/EDC/Mullins\\_2007.pdf](http://www.westminster-ma.gov/pages/WestminsterMA_BComm/EDC/Mullins_2007.pdf)

The report concluded with the following recommendations:

- The present zoning bylaw, including the limitation of retail operations to no more than 25,000 square feet of floor space, should remain in place at this time.
- The Town should explore means and methods to ensure tighter performance standards and site design requirements that reflect the Town's character.
- The Town, working through its partners at the State and Regional level, should begin to market the Corridor.
- The Town should explore designating its two industrial parks as Priority Development sites through the State's streamlined permitting legislation (MGL 43D).
- The Town should explore the creation of a mixed use overlay district for at least part of the Corridor.
- The Town should determine if it is adequately covered in terms of fiber-optic connectivity.
- The Town, through use of the Fiscal Impact Assessment Model (described in detail within the report), should carefully monitor the financial impacts of growth and report the findings on an annual basis.

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- The Town should continue the activities of the Economic Development Study Committee.



While the Economic Development Study Committee ceased its activities in early 2011 after an exhaustive review of a lifestyle mall proposed for the Simplex Drive area (never built), the Town has gone forward and implemented several of the recommendations from the Mullins report, including: designating three industrial districts as Priority

Development sites through MGL 43D. Many of the Economic Development Study Committee's activities are now being carried out by the newly formed Economic Development Committee (EDC). Created by the Board of Selectmen during the summer of 2012, the EDC's charge is to take a broader town-wide view of economic development, and look for ways to promote the Town to the outside world for the purpose of encouraging new economic activity and the tax revenues it could bring to Town.

### Community Preferences for Economic Development:

The previous section provided an overview of the region's economic situation and the State and Regional plans to address existing deficiencies and the needs of the future. It is time to turn our attention to something a bit more concrete: what do Westminster residents want for economic development in Town and where do they want it?

The Master Plan Citizen Survey asked respondents to list the types of economic development they would like to see in the Town's existing commercial and industrial zoning districts. Here are the responses:

#### Preferred land uses for the Town Center:

- Restaurants 451
- Small-scale retail 358
- Services 331
- Professional offices 315

#### Preferred land uses for Simplex Drive:

- Research & development 419
- Light manufacturing 397
- Biotechnology 372
- Office parks 371
- Warehouse & storage 343

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Preferred land uses for the Westminster Business Park:

- Light manufacturing 404
- Research & development 384
- Warehouse & storage 366
- Biotechnology 338
- Office parks 333

Preferred land uses for Route 140 Commercial District:

- Office parks 258
- Light manufacturing 251
- Warehouse & storage 245
- Hardware stores 233
- Research & development 231
- Professional offices 217
- Biotechnology 213
- Restaurants 210

Preferred land uses for Village Inn Road Commercial District:

- Restaurants 348
- Professional offices 313
- Small-scale retail 24

The survey results indicate that respondents want to keep industrial uses in the industrial districts and commercial uses in the commercial districts. The uses preferred for the Town Center are consistent with those of a typical New England village.

### Opportunities for Economic Development:

What follows is a brief discussion on the assets that make Westminster an attractive place for new economic development.

- Location: The areas that Westminster has zoned for economic development all have easy access to Route 2, Route 140, with I-190 being ten minutes away and I-495 being twenty minutes away. Westminster directly abuts the region's three major employment centers (Fitchburg, Gardner and Leominster), is a mere half an hour away from the City of Worcester, and approximately an hour away from the City of Boston.
- Town Center: Westminster's Town Center is easily accessible from Route 2 and represents the Town's primary location for local village-scale commerce and services. There are locally owned and operated retail establishments like the Westminster Pharmacy and Vincent's Market, and there are two shopping plazas that have a few vacant storefronts available for new businesses. The Town Center contains many buildings of historic significance like the Cracker Factory, the Library, the Upton Building, the Old Town Hall, and the Town Common is just up the road on Academy Hill. The Town Common hosts a weekly farmer's market from May through October and

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Wednesday night band concerts in July and August. The Town Center still retains much of the charm of a typical New England Village, and the residents are keen to preserve this charm while expanding the number of businesses and services.

- Large Industrial Zones Available for Development: The Town has two large swaths of industrially-zoned land that have a considerable amount of vacant and developable land. The first is the Westminster Business Park off of Depot Road. The Park contains 249 acres of land and is fully permitted for 1.57 million square feet of new floor space. While the first phase of the Park is complete, the second and larger phase is still under construction and may take as many as ten more years to complete. The Park also has 7,000 linear feet of frontage along the Boston & Maine railroad line (owned by Pan Am Southern) with three park lots having the potential to be used for the shipping and receiving of freight. The first of these lots has been purchased by the tax-exempt Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) and will be developed as a train layover facility for the new Wachusett Station being built across the border in Fitchburg. The second lot with freight rail access may be deliverable in ten years and the last lot will take even longer to be ready for development.

The second large industrial area is Simplex Drive. This site consists of 95 acres in a lush wooded setting. There is an existing building on the other side of the road that contains 658,017 square feet of floor space, two thirds of which is still available for lease. This building was once fully owner-occupied by its builder, Digital Equipment Corporation, and is currently 2/3 vacant and being marketed for light industrial/office reuse. Beyond the existing building, this site has enough vacant developable land to accommodate an additional one million square feet of new floor space. MassDevelopment (the State entity charged with attracting new businesses to Massachusetts) has chosen to include these two sites as part of its “Top Ten Priority Development Sites” marketing campaign.

In the previously cited report, entitled: Final Report of the Economic Development Study Committee: Westminster’s Future Economic Development Opportunities, Dr. John Mullin says that the Simplex Drive and Westminster Business Park both have virtually all of the requirements to host first class industrial/office uses: parcels greater than 50 acres in size, zoned for industrial use, municipal water and sewer, fiber optic connectivity, land free of environmental hazards, land is accessible without having to go through residential areas, free of steep slopes, within 30 minutes of air freight facilities, and within ten minutes of a major highway. The fact that Westminster has not one but *two* industrial areas that meet the requirements for industrial/office uses, Dr. Mullin considers this to be a “rarity”.

- Bio Ready: In 2011, the Massachusetts Biotechnology Council (an industry trade group for the biotechnology industry) reviewed the Town’s zoning through its Bio-Ready program and issued Westminster the coveted “Gold” rating. This rating puts the Town in a better position to attract biotechnology firms to locate in Westminster.

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- Priority Development Sites and Streamlined Permitting: The Town has three sites listed with the State as Priority Development sites under MGL Chapter 43D: Simplex Drive, Westminster Business Park and the Route 31 industrial district. To encourage development in these areas, the Town has set up an expedited permitting program for both (all permit decisions to be issued within 180 days of a filed application).
- Technical Review Board: For large-scale development projects, the Town has a Technical Review Board in place consisting of staff from various departments including: Fire, Police, Building, Department of Public Works, Health, Conservation and the Town Planner. The Review Board is available to meet with an applicant prior to or during the permitting process. The idea behind the Board is to have an applicant get the Town's input in a one stop setting, instead of obtaining comments department by department.
- Eco-Tourism Opportunities: The Town's Master Plan from 2000 sets forth an ambitious eco-tourism strategy and, while not much of it was implemented in the ensuing years, the potential still exists for many of the ideas mentioned, including: participating in a regional tour of historic New England villages, highlighting the Town's industrial heritage, promoting its outdoor recreation assets, promoting the Town's tourism-oriented businesses through a marketing brochure, and hosting festivals and special events of regional significance. The Town is actually working on a few of these ideas at present. The Town's Economic Development Committee (EDC) is currently working on the preparation of a promotional brochure, both paper and web-based, that will highlight what Westminster has to offer for: special events, historic resources, recreation resources, restaurants, lodging, arts and crafts, health and wellness, and agriculture. The EDC is also evaluating the possibility of hosting a festival of some sort in the next few years.
- Agriculture: Westminster has a Right to Farm bylaw in place and an Agricultural Commission charged with implementing said bylaw. While agriculture is not a large component of Westminster's economic sector, it has historically been an integral part of the Town's landscape since Westminster's incorporation. There are still several working farms in Town and they help maintain the rural character that the citizens prize so much. From May through October, the Agricultural Commission operates a very well attended weekly farmer's market at the Town Common on Academy Hill that draws visitors from around the region.

### Impediments to Economic Development:

What follows is a brief discussion of the impediments to new economic development in Westminster.

- Spending and Taxes: As outlined in the Town Government chapter, Westminster's town government spends more on services per capita than its immediate neighbors. In the Master Plan citizen survey, respondents identified the Town's high tax rate as their number one concern. If Westminster's economic sector does not grow and increase its contribution to the local tax base, it will be up to the homeowners to cover an ever-larger percentage of the Town's annual operating budget. In order to arrest this trend,

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Westminster needs to fully utilize those areas of Town designated for economic development. A revitalized Town Center combined with appropriate development in the Town's existing industrial zoning districts will help ease the tax burden on local homeowners.

- Lack of Sewer Capacity: The lack of capacity at the Whitman River Pump Station is **THE** single biggest impediment to economic development in Westminster. Without a substantial upgrade of the pump station, new businesses and industries cannot tie into the municipal sewer system and existing businesses and industries cannot expand if they will generate additional wastewater. Left unaddressed the sewer capacity issue will hinder all types of development in Westminster (economic *and* residential). More details on the Town's sewer capacity issue can be found in the Town Government chapter under the Department of Public Works section. There are two options for addressing this issue that are currently being debated: 1) Eliminate the Whitman River pump station and replacing it with a three-barrel siphon under the Whitman River, and increasing the diameter of the existing gravity sewer to Fitchburg. This option will allow the Town to complete *all* phases of the sewer expansion plan outlined in the Town's Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan. 2) Construct an in-line sewer storage station in the vicinity of the Whitman River. The station's design is complete and, once built, it will be able to accommodate peak flows from the Phase I, II and V sewer expansion areas outlined in the Town's Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan. This option would prevent the Town from having to significantly alter the existing Whitman River Pump Station, force mains and downstream piping systems. The Town is currently evaluated both of these options and the grant opportunities to fund them.
- Lack of Marketing: Too often, Westminster has relied solely on its state and regional partners to market the Town and its assets. As these entities have multiple clients, they cannot give each individual town the attention required for an extensive and targeted marketing campaign. The Town's Economic Development Committee has decided to supplement the marketing efforts of our state and regional partners with its own home-grown marketing effort (the previously mentioned brochure). In addition, the Town is working to improve its coordination with the Central MA Convention and Visitors Bureau and its affiliate the Johnny Appleseed Visitor's Center along Route 2 in Lancaster in an effort to better market Westminster to tourists.
- Town Center Zoning: While the Master Plan citizen survey and public forums indicate a preference for the Town Center to remain a quaint New England-style village, the current zoning actually discourages this. The majority of Town Center is zoned for residential purposes with small lot-specific commercial districts. Thus, anytime an owner wants to change the use of his/her lot from residential to commercial (or visa-versa), they must seek approval from Town Meeting. The current zoning is also problematic in terms of the placement of new buildings, as the setback requirements all but preclude buildings being located close together or close to Main Street. The Zoning Bylaw is also bereft of the type of design standards that one would typically find for a New England-style village: locating parking behind buildings, building façade standards, landscaping, signage, period lighting, etc. Unlike many communities, Westminster's Town Center is not so

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developed as to preclude the creation a typical New England village; however, the area's zoning standards are in need of drastic revisions if the Town wants to see a true New England village take shape.

- Town Center Lack of Parking: With the exception of the two shopping plazas, the Town Center does not have enough parking to accommodate a significant expansion of economic activity. In many instances, people park their cars along the side of Main Street even though the State has posted the street with "No Parking" signs. In particular, there is limited parking at the Library and just side street parking for the Pharmacy. If Westminster is serious about expanding economic activity in the Town Center, then it will need to address the area's lack of parking.
- Lack of Strategy: The Town does not have a coordinated municipal economic development strategy and the ability of existing staff to implement such a strategy is limited. It is hoped that Westminster planners will adopt the recommendations contained at the end of this chapter as an overall economic strategy for the Town. In terms of implementing the recommendations, this will be a matter of coordinating our activities with our State and regional partners, and expanding existing staff capability within Town Hall. While the Town does not have the population size to warrant the hiring of a full-time economic development specialist, it could hire a part-time person or work through the regional planning commission (MRPC) to either share an ED specialist with another community or support a new MRPC hire who would work exclusively on economic development.
- Lack of Specialized Technical Workforce: Many of the previously cited regional reports have identified the lack of a workforce trained in the specialized manufacturing that is taking place within the region. This is not an issue the Town can address on its own, but will require a coordinated and sustained regional effort from all parties involved.

### Westminster's Participation in State and Regional Economic Initiatives

What follows is a brief summary of Westminster's participation in State and regional economic development initiatives.

1. *The Massachusetts Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP)*: Created by the Legislature in 1993, the EDIP is designed to stimulate job creation in distressed areas, attract new businesses, encourage existing businesses to expand and increase overall economic readiness among Massachusetts towns and cities. The MA Office of Business Development administers the EDIP. The Economic Assistance Coordinating Council (EACC) oversees the EDIP and is charged with three responsibilities:

- Designating Economic Target Areas (ETAs)
- Designating Economic Opportunity Areas (EOAs) within an ETA
- Designating Certified Projects within an EOA

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There are two benefits that the State confers on Certified Projects within designated EOAs: a 5% Investment Tax Credit for qualifying investments and a 10% Abandoned Building Tax Deduction for costs associated with renovating an abandoned building. The entirety of Westminster was designated as its own Economic Target Area in 1995 through an act of the State Legislature. The Town currently has three designated Economic Opportunity Areas: Simplex Drive, Westminster Business Park (off Depot Road) and the Business Park at Westminster (Rowtier Drive).

2. *Tax Increment Financing (TIF)*: In an effort to lure new economic development and retain existing businesses, Westminster has the option of using a local Tax Increment Financing (TIF) program as an incentive. A local TIF program usually operates in the following manner: a new business or existing business wishing to expand would need to demonstrate that it will hire people from Westminster and the immediate area and that it will utilize local businesses and construction firms for its new/expanded building. In return, the Town would forgive a percentage of the taxes assessed on the new/expanded building over a period of several years. The percentage of forgiven assessed taxes would get smaller over a designated period of time. The establishment of a TIF project would require Town Meeting approval.

Local TIF programs have been the subjects of criticism lately due to concerns over lost tax revenue. However, citizens need to realize that local TIF programs help to keep jobs in their community (many of which are held by local residents), promote the use of local businesses for the building/expansion effort and help to attract new businesses that otherwise may not come to their community. During the past twenty years, Westminster has utilized the TIF program on two occasions and with mixed results:

-- Tyco received a TIF in 1998, but was decertified by the State in 2010 for not meeting its job creation targets.

-- Wachusett Animal Hospital received a TIF in 2010 that will run for a length of ten years. Thus far, the Hospital has met its job creation targets.

3. *MassDevelopment*: This entity acts as the State's industrial financing authority. It works primarily with industries and non-profit organizations; however, it does offer several programs that provide technical assistance to municipalities. MassDevelopment administers the Predevelopment Assistance Program that can help municipalities fund projects that will result in economic benefits to the community and the region. MassDevelopment can help with site-specific projects and can assist with appraisals, financing, site planning and architectural services. MassDevelopment was instrumental in having the Wachusett Animal Hospital locate in Westminster and is actively involved in recruiting new businesses to the Town's three Priority Development sites (more on this in the next paragraph).

4. *State Streamlined Permitting Program*: Created by the State in 2006 under MGL Chapter 43D, the State's Streamlined Permitting Program is administered by the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development (EOHED). Local communities wishing to opt into this program must identify its Priority Development Sites (PDS), commit to issuing all necessary permits for projects proposed within a PDS within 180 days of filing an application, and amend

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its bylaws and regulations to enshrine the permit action timeline. Westminster opted into the Program in March of 2009 and has designated three PDS locations: Simplex Drive, Westminster Business Park and the Route 31 industrial district. In 2010 the Town prepared an Expedited Permitting Guidebook which can be found here: [http://www.westminster-ma.gov/pages/westminsterMA\\_Planning/Ch43D\\_Guidebook.pdf](http://www.westminster-ma.gov/pages/westminsterMA_Planning/Ch43D_Guidebook.pdf). As of the writing of this chapter, the Town is still waiting for its first project to go through its streamlined permitting process.

5. *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)*: Under the federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) Reform Act of 1998, economic development projects are required to be consistent with a regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) in order to be eligible for EDA funding. For North-Central Massachusetts, the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) is charged with preparing the regional CEDS. The EDA offers a variety of funding opportunities for projects dealing with energy efficiency, disaster relief, rural job creation, university research and public works projects. The most recent iteration of the regional CEDS is the previously referenced Building a Better Montachusett, prepared by MRPC in 2009. The CEDS is updated every few years and Westminster routinely sends a municipal representative to participate on the Town's behalf.

6. *Regional Chambers of Commerce*: The Town of Westminster is a member of two regional chambers of commerce: the North-Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce and the Greater-Gardner Chamber of Commerce. The Town's involvement with these two organizations has been limited to date.

7. *Johnny Appleseed Trail Association*: This is the regional tourism bureau for North-Central Massachusetts and operates under the umbrella of the MA Office of Travel and Tourism. Westminster advertises the town and community events in the Spring and Fall editions of the Johnny Appleseed Country Visitor Guides and has an advertisement on display at their visitor center along Route 2 – Westbound in Lancaster.

### **Economic Development - Goal**

Westminster desires a robust and diverse local economy that provides tax revenues for the town and living wage jobs for local residents in a business friendly environment, with a timely and predictable permitting system and a municipal infrastructure capable of supporting new and expanding businesses and industries.

### **Economic Development - Objectives**

- Educate residents on the importance of economic development for its contribution to the local tax base and the creation of in-town jobs.
- Upgrade and expand the infrastructure necessary to encourage new economic development.

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- Develop a well-trained and educated workforce that is capable of fulfilling the regional economy's emerging employment needs.
- Design an economic development strategy that will retain existing businesses and attract new businesses that pay living wages, such as the manufacturing and biotechnology sectors.
- Utilize our existing economic zoning districts for their intended purposes: commercial operations in our existing commercial districts and industrial operations in our existing industrial districts.
- Create a vibrant New England-style village center that contains a diversity of services, restaurants and shopping opportunities.
- Commercial operations shall endeavor to seamlessly blend into Westminster's existing landscape and contribute to the character of the community.
- Encourage agriculture for a source of locally produced food and as a means of preserving the Town's rural character.
- Capitalize on our existing community resources (open space, recreation, history, agriculture and iconic businesses) to promote eco-tourism.
- Expand access to our outdoor natural landscapes as a means of encouraging recreation-related tourism.
- Take the initiative to promote ourselves while continuing to work with our state and regional partners to attract tourists and new economic development.

### Economic Development – Recommendations

1. Address the Sewer Capacity Issue: Simply put, the lack of capacity at the Whitman River Pump Station is **THE** single biggest impediment to economic development in Westminster. Without a substantial upgrade of the pump station, new buildings in the Town Center cannot tie into the municipal sewer system and existing buildings cannot expand if they will generate additional wastewater. Thus, the capacity issue hinders all types of development in Town Center (commercial *and* residential). Without an upgrade of the pump station or other means of increasing the capacity of the sewer system (such as the previously mentioned in-line sewer storage system), new development cannot take place in the Town Center and the heart of Westminster will be left to stagnate. Additionally, the sewer system cannot accommodate additional sewer flow from new or expanded industrial or commercial buildings in the Town's two largest 43D Priority Development sites. As mentioned previously, the Simplex Drive Priority Development site consists of 100 acres and enough vacant developable land remains at this location to accommodate well over one million square feet of new commercial/ industrial/ office floor space. The Westminster Business Park Priority Development site consists of plans

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for the eventual construction of 1.57 million square feet of new industrial floor space on 312 acres of land. While the Town is committed to hosting new economic development in the Town Center and its two largest Priority Development Sites, new development in at these locations is at a standstill the Town addresses its sewer capacity issue. The Town should choose its preferred option for addressing the sewer capacity issue, continue to search out grant/loan opportunities to fund the selected option (such as the MassWorks infrastructure grant program and the Rural Development infrastructure loan/grant program), and continue to press its case to our legislative delegation and State funding entities. Responsible Municipal Entities: The Public Works Commissioners, Board of Selectmen and Town Planner.

2. Village Zoning for Town Center: The Town should consider consolidating the various zoning districts that comprise the Town Center into a single mixed-use district with development standards that would encourage a more traditional New England village center development pattern. Our current Town Center is divided into residential and commercial zoning districts (including some commercial districts that would qualify as “spot zoning”), each with its own set of dimensional standards and allowable uses. The Town would benefit economically from having more people and businesses in the Town Center. Development standards to consider for this district could include: zero front yard setbacks, minimum side setbacks, discouraging stand-alone commercial operations that require large amounts of parking, locating buildings in front of the lot with parking in the rear, façade design standards, signage and lighting standards, shared parking, mixed use buildings (shops on first floor, apartments above). When considering what design standards to adopt for a newly created village center district, the Town would benefit from having a design workshop that would utilize the talents of landscape architects to help citizens visualize their preferred aesthetics for the Town Center. From the Master Plan citizen survey, it is clear that Westminster residents prefer the following uses for the Town Center: restaurants, small-scale retail stores, service establishments (tailors, dry-cleaners, financial services, etc.) and professional offices (doctors, dentists, lawyers, etc.). The Zoning Bylaw’s table of uses for a new village center should be expanded to include more of these opportunities. Responsible Municipal Entities: The Planning Board in conjunction with the Board of Selectmen.

3. Modernize and Update Zoning Bylaw’s Table of Uses: The current table of uses in the Zoning Bylaw was prepared in the early 1970s and, as such, is out of date and does not include many types of retail and service establishments that have come into existence within the last 40 years (biotechnology facilities as an industrial example and computer repair services as a commercial example). The Zoning Bylaw’s table of uses should be revised to update and expand the types of commercial and industrial uses the Town wants to encourage. The Town already has a head-start on this effort with the 2010 report, Analysis of Table of Use Schedule and Dimensional Regulations in Industrial and Commercial Zones, prepared by Planning Consultant William Scanlan from funding made available through MRPC’s Technical Assistance Program. This report should be revisited as a first step in revising the table of uses. Responsible Municipal Entities: The Planning Board in conjunction with the Economic Development Committee.

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4. Revise the Dimensional Standards for the Industrial Districts: The 2010 Scanlan report also evaluated the Zoning Bylaw's dimensional standards as they relate to the Town's two types of industrial districts. The report found three flaws in the dimensional standards: 1) restricting industrial buildings to two stories is self-defeating. Increasing the limit to four stories will provide greater opportunity for first class office and research-development space. 2) The setbacks required for the industrial districts are very restrictive and provide little benefit. Reduced setbacks will enable more intensive use of valuable industrial land. 3) The Town should consider providing a density bonus to those industrial uses that will include pervious surfaces (porous pavement that allows for groundwater discharge) for a portion of their parking needs. One last flaw identified by the Town Planner and Building Commissioner is the 50-foot height restriction in the Zoning Bylaw as it relates to cell tower antennas that extend from principal and/or accessory structures. Currently, industrial property owners must obtain a height variance from the Zoning Board in order to construct such antennas. The Zoning Bylaw's dimensional standards for industrial uses should be revised to allow for greater use of the Town's industrial-zoned land. Again, revisiting the 2010 Scanlan report would be a wise first step for this endeavor. Responsible Municipal Entities: The Planning Board in conjunction with the Economic Development Committee.
  
5. Funding for Economic Development Initiatives: The Economic Development Committee (EDC) does not have an operating budget and this limits its ability to be an effective advocate on the Town's behalf. The EDC should request an annual needs-based budget from the Town to cover the cost of: mailings, outreach, advertising and training. However, funding for large-scale initiatives like an annual town festival and printing of marketing materials would need to be funded through Town Meeting funding requests. At some point, it would behoove the EDC to investigate its options for a dedicated funding source that could fund the more ambitious items in its work plan. Responsible Municipal Entities: Economic Development Committee and Town Planner.
  
6. Acquire Professional Assistance for Economic Development Initiatives: Many Massachusetts communities have sought to increase their institutional capacity in regards to attracting new economic development. While many of the larger communities have professional economic development staff, this is often not an affordable option for smaller communities like Westminster. Typically, communities with populations under 10,000 residents have secured professional economic development assistance in a couple of ways: developing a specific task-by-task economic development work plan and hiring an ED professional for implementation, or contracting ED professional assistance through their regional planning commissions. While MRPC does not currently have a bonafide economic professional on staff, this could change if they heard from enough member communities that professional ED assistance was a desired service. Responsible Municipal Entities: Economic Development Committee and Board of Selectmen.
  
7. Develop a Computerized Database of Available Commercial and Industrial Properties: The Town should to develop a computerized database of its available commercially and industrially zoned properties as a service for new businesses and industries investigating Westminster as a potential location. The database should be web-based, searchable by parcel size, availability of water and sewer, proximity to major roadways, easements on the property

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and any other information that a potential developer may find useful. Responsible Municipal Entities: Economic Development Committee and Town Planner working with the Board of Assessors.

8. New Business Recruitment: The Town should identify those businesses and industries it wants to attract to Westminster and actively solicit them. A good place to start would be the Worcester Business Journal which prepares an annual list of the top 100 employers in Central Massachusetts. For the selected businesses and industries, the Town could send a solicitation letter to the CEOs along with a packet containing the following information: list of municipal contacts, maps and descriptions of available properties, links to the local permitting process (specifically the 43D Expedited Permitting Guidebook specified previously), and links to State resources that can assist with the relocation effort. Further, the Town could talk with its existing businesses and industries to identify any suppliers or customers that may want to relocate to Westminster. Such a solicitation effort would be low-risk high-reward. If even one business/industry were to relocate to Westminster based on this effort, then it would be a worthwhile endeavor. Responsible Municipal Entities: Economic Development Committee, Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator and Town Planner.

9. Coordinate Development Activity with owners of Industrial Land: As noted previously, the vast majority of Westminster's industrially zoned land is under private ownership. As it is quite unlikely that the Town will purchase and develop its own industrial parks, it is paramount that Westminster's policy-makers work in partnership with the owners of industrial land to ensure such land is developed in accordance with the Town's objectives and renders assistance when possible. Such assistance could be in the form of extending municipal infrastructure, or simply helping the land-owners access the technical assistance made available by the myriad of private/public entities that promote economic development. Responsible Municipal Entities: Economic Development Committee, Planning Board, Board of Selectmen and Town Planner.

10. Liaison between Businesses and Economic Development Agencies: To the extent possible, the Town should serve as a liaison between local businesses and industries and our state and regional partners for the purpose of providing job training and workforce education opportunities. This means our policy makers and municipal staff need to keep their ears to the ground when talking to local business owners to identify their workforce education/training needs so they can be linked with the appropriate state or regional resource. Responsible Municipal Entities: Board of Selectmen, Economic Development Committee, Planning Board, Town Administrator and Town Planner.

11. Prepare and Distribute a Promotional Brochure: The Town should proactively promote itself to the outside world by preparing a brochure (both paper and web-based) that highlights Westminster's many resources that may be of interests to visitors. The Economic Development Committee is currently working on such a brochure which will contain content on the following categories: town & civic events, recreation resources, historic resources, dining, lodging, health & wellness, arts & crafts, and agriculture. There will be a map showing where these places are located in town and a brief description of each resource. Responsible Municipal Entities: Economic Development Committee and Town Planner.

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12. Historic Wayfaring Signage: The Town should install historic wayfaring signage to help direct tourists and regional visitors to our many resources: recreation spots, historic sites, food and lodging opportunities, town common, etc. Many small communities in the Berkshires and Vermont have installed such signage to great effect. Responsible Municipal Entities: Economic Development Committee, Historical Commission, Department of Public Works and Town Planner.

13. Participate in a Regional Tour of Historic Villages: The Town should work with the regional transit agency (the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority, or MART for short), the regional tourism bureau (Johnny Appleseed) and its neighbors in the region to sponsor tour of historic villages. There are several nearby communities that also have historic villages: Ashburnham, Barre, Hubbardston, Phillipston, Templeton and Winchendon. One looped bus route could touch all seven village centers. BY using Route 2 as a cut-through, two loops are formed for shorter tours, once to the south and another to the north. Each stop on the loop would need to have substantial points of interest to tourists. Responsible Municipal Entities: Board of Selectmen, Economic Development Committee, Historical Commission working in conjunction with MART and the Johnny Appleseed Trail Association.

14. Sponsor an Annual Festival: The Town should investigate what it would take to sponsor an annual festival that would attract tourists and regional residents. Consider the success that some of the other regional festivals have had, such as the Red Apple Festival in Phillipston, the Oktoberfest in Gardner, the fall music festival at Wachusett Mountain or the North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival held in nearby Orange. Westminster itself has some recent experience holding successful public events, such as the Town's 250<sup>th</sup> Celebration in 2010. The Celebration consisted of a series of well attended events throughout Town. Items to consider when planning such an event would include: when to hold it, how to market it, what events to host (5K road race, concert on the Town Common, parade as some examples), what would be needed for resources (materials, supplies, etc.), what would be required for public safety, the overall cost of the event, and how to secure the funding necessary to host it. The EDC is already investigating this option, but it needs to be understood that such events must be carefully planned and marketed, and will undoubtedly take a significant amount of time to come to fruition. However, having a successful first event could breed momentum for subsequent events. Responsible Municipal Entities: Economic Development Committee, Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator, Town Planner, and public safety officials.

15. Evaluate the Fiscal Impacts of All Large-Scale Development Proposals: Westminster needs to take the long view when evaluating large-scale development proposals, particularly those that necessitate significant changes to current zoning. Due to the strategic location of Westminster's two primary economic areas (Simplex Drive and the Westminster Business Park), and the fact that these areas have virtually all of the requirements necessary to host first class industrial/office uses, the Town will likely see large-scale development projects proposed for these areas at some point within the next decade. Some development projects may require changes to current zoning and some developers may even propose zoning changes that fall under the State's umbrella of "Smart Growth" zoning techniques, such as: smart growth zoning districts created under MGL Chapter 40R, planned unit developments (PUD), transit-oriented developments (TOD), mixed use developments, and compact developments. The Town needs to

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recognize Simplex Drive and the Westminster Business Park as the jewels that they are and realize that no other town along the Route 2 corridor can claim having industrial zoning districts this large right off the highway and with available infrastructure. Offices, research facilities and other industry represent the optimal and preferred uses for these areas and the Town needs to be patient and wait for industrial development to continue expanding westward from the I-95 belt until it reaches Westminster, which make take as long as twenty years to happen. The Town is in decent fiscal shape and there is no immediate need to develop these areas for the purpose of creating new tax revenues. Developing these areas for retail development would create jobs for teenagers and senior citizens and, while there is a need for such jobs, the Town would be better served having these areas developed for office and industry, which would result in living wage jobs for those hired. As mentioned previously, the Town has had a longstanding economic goal of creating living wage jobs for Westminster residents.

As a means of evaluating large-scale development proposals and the zoning changes necessary to accommodate them, the Town should require developers to submit a Fiscal Impact Analysis that utilizes the Interactive Fiscal Impact Model specified in the 2007 Final Report of the Economic Development Study Committee: Westminster's Future Economic Development Opportunities (otherwise known as the Mullin report). The Mullins report provides the detailed methodology for an evaluation of fiscal impact, but simply put: the fiscal impact of development is calculated by subtracting the total costs associated with development by the total revenue that can be anticipated from development. Further, the Town should have the submitted Fiscal Impact Analysis peer reviewed by a qualified economic development professional. Having an evaluation of fiscal impacts is critical if Westminster policy makers are to make informed decisions about adopting new smart growth techniques or welcoming large-scale development proposals that plan to utilize such techniques. Any developer that balks at providing a fiscal impact analysis should be viewed with suspicion.

The Town needs to remember that *it* controls the destiny of these two economic areas and any development that occurs should be in keeping with the Town's community character and economic objectives. Responsible Municipal Entities: Economic Development Committee, Planning Board, Board of Selectmen and Town Planner.

16. Investigate the Federal Brownfields Program: The term "brownfields" commonly refers to a property whose expansion or redevelopment may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant. Administered by the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), getting a contaminated property cleaned up through the Brownfields program usually follows this sequence:

- Phase I Site Assessment: The purpose of the Phase I Site Assessment is to determine the likelihood that some form of environmental contamination is present at the site. EPA rules require an environmental professional complete a thorough site investigation. The site investigation includes a visual site assessment, interview with past and present owners and occupants, a search for any environmental liens, a review of historical documents, a search of federal, state, and local databases regarding contamination at or near the site, and a number of other investigations. Completion of a Phase I Site Assessment affords a prospective purchaser, innocent landowner, or contiguous property

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owner of Environmental Due Diligence protection from future liability for contamination that is currently present at the site. Findings in a Phase I report will determine whether or not further site investigation is warranted.

- Phase II Site Investigation: Phase II Site Investigations include a more thorough review of conditions at the site. Phase II investigations typically include: performing soil borings and collecting soil samples, installing water monitoring wells and collecting groundwater samples from each well, and analyzing all samples for the presence of contaminants. Phase II investigations allow for a more comprehensive report of what contaminants are present on the property and how much of the contaminant is present. Reports that note levels of contaminants above the state standard likely will contain a recommendation for a Phase III Investigation and Remedial Action Plan.
- Phase III Site Investigation and Remedial Action Plan: The Phase III Investigation and Remedial Action Plan is typically the final stage of a Brownfields Program. Phase III investigations consist of the additional collection of soil and groundwater samples and continued investigation of any anomalies discovered during the Phase II investigation. The Remedial Action Plan consists of a Soils and Material Management Plan for off-site disposal or on-site reuse of impacted soil, suggestions for ongoing groundwater monitoring, a list of permit requirements needed to engage in remedial action, and suggestions for the use of institutional controls such as activity use restrictions. Completion of a Phase III/Remedial Action Plan triggers the necessity of on-site cleanup.
- Environmental Clean-up and Site Redevelopment: Cleanup of the contaminated site using funds from the Brownfields Remediation Loan Program. Cleanup costs can be offset by accessing the State's Brownfield Tax Credit Program and the Brownfields Redevelopment Access to Capital program which offers low-cost, often state-subsidized, environmental insurance to help mitigate risk associated with brownfields redevelopment.

Currently there are approximately 50 known sites in Westminster where hazardous material spills have occurred and many would make good candidates for participating in the Brownfields Program. However, it should be noted that the Program can also be used to remediate buildings with contamination problems such as mold and asbestos. The Brownfields Program could be a vehicle for rehabilitating the Old Town Hall for eventual reuse and the Town should investigate this possibility. In the past, the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) has received Brownfields funds to administer at the regional level, but the funds were minimal and targeted to the region's larger communities. It has been several years since MRPC had Brownfield funds to administer and it has no plans to apply for such funding in the immediate future. The Brownfield Program can be very difficult to administer at the local level and the Town would need to hire outside assistance if it were to pursue Brownfield funds. Responsible Municipal Entities: Board of Selectmen, Economic Development Committee, Board of Health, Town Administrator, and Town Planner.

# WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

