

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

TOWN GOVERNMENT CHAPTER: FACILITIES AND SERVICES



This was the first chapter undertaken by the Master Plan Committee. Started in the fall of 2011, this chapter took a full year to complete. All of the Town's departments, boards, committees and commissions helped us compile the information contained herein.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

TOWN GOVERNMENT: FACILITIES & SERVICES

This chapter of the Master Plan presents a general description of Westminster's town government, municipal facilities and services. For this chapter, each department head was interviewed and information was collected regarding organizational structure, staffing, budget, responsibilities, equipment, facilities, programs offered and future capital needs.

TAXATION

Before beginning an in-depth analysis of the Town's major municipal departments, it is important to understand the Town's revenue sources and the tax implications for Westminster households (average single family home tax bill, average single family home assessed valuation, local tax levies and state aid).

Table TG-1
Average Single Family Tax Bill - Year 2012

<u>Westminster</u>	<u>Ashburnham</u>	<u>Hubbardston</u>	<u>Princeton</u>	<u>Gardner</u>	<u>Leominster</u>	<u>Fitchburg</u>
\$3,989	\$3,757	\$2,999	\$5,096	\$2,864	\$3,640	\$2,913

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

The table above indicates that Westminster had the second highest average single-family home tax bill for fiscal year 2012, with only Princeton's average tax bill being higher. Westminster's average single family home tax bill was \$2,083 in the year 2000 and this jumped to \$3,989 in 2012, an increase of 91% during the past 12 years. This rate of increase in the single family home tax bill was much higher than Westminster's immediate neighbors, where the increase in the single family home tax bill ranged from 61% (Gardner) to 81% (Ashburnham) between 2000 and 2012. As can be seen from the results of the Master Plan citizen survey, the responding residents identified the high tax rate as the Number One undesirable aspect about living in Westminster.

Table TG-2
Average Assessed Valuation per Single Family Home - Year 2012

<u>Westminster</u>	<u>Ashburnham</u>	<u>Hubbardston</u>	<u>Princeton</u>	<u>Gardner</u>	<u>Leominster</u>	<u>Fitchburg</u>
\$231,402	\$204,859	\$236,155	\$302,636	\$171,817	\$217,724	\$165,319

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

Westminster's 2012 average assessed valuation per single family home was somewhere in the middle when compared to its neighbors. While lower than Hubbardston and Princeton, Westminster's averaged assessed evaluation was substantially higher than the region's two urban centers: Fitchburg and Gardner. Westminster and all of its neighbors saw dramatic increases in their assessed valuations for single family homes during the last decade, with Westminster's average assessed valuation rising by 150% between 2000 and 2008 and its neighbors experiencing similar increases, with the exception of Princeton where the average assessed valuation rose by only 87%. However, the collapse of the national economy that began in 2007, especially the housing sector, brought substantial reductions in the averaged assessed valuation per home for Westminster and its neighbors. Since 2008 when the average assessed valuation per home peaked in Westminster (\$296,440), this figure has dropped by 28% and now stands at \$231,402. Westminster's neighbors also saw comparable

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

decreases. It should be noted that while the average assessed value for a single family home has steadily decreased over the past four years, there has not been a similar drop in the average single family home tax bill which, as Table TG-1 indicates, has continued to rise. Westminster is not alone in this regard as this is a regional phenomenon.

The following tables identify the sources of Westminster's revenue from Local Tax Levies and Non-Education State Aid.

Table TG-3
Local Tax Levies - Year 2012

<u>Community</u>	<u>Taxes - Residential</u>	<u>Taxes - Commercial</u>	<u>Taxes - Industrial</u>	<u>Personal Property</u>	<u>Res. as % of Total Taxes</u>
Westminster	\$11,665,695	\$994,678	\$919,780	\$861,944	80.8%
Ashburnham	\$10,060,587	\$251,420	\$87,520	\$160,122	95.3%
Fitchburg	\$30,273,150	\$5,181,304	\$2,613,298	\$2,715,552	74.2%
Gardner	\$16,292,027	\$1,797,950	\$1,037,861	\$627,444	82.4%
Hubbardston	\$5,120,417	\$190,313	\$86,105	\$115,919	92.9%
Leominster	\$41,204,738	\$6,481,750	\$3,235,490	\$2,224,457	77.5%
Princeton	\$7,040,636	\$90,982	\$27,185	\$181,606	95.9%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

The general rule in municipal finance is that towns are considered to be "bedroom communities" if they derive more than 90% of their total tax revenue from residential property taxes. With residential development generating just over 80% of the Town's total tax revenue, Westminster does not fit the profile of a bedroom community, meaning that it has a significant amount of commercial and industrial tax payers when compared to its other "small town" neighbors like Ashburnham, Hubbardston and Princeton. In fact, Westminster derives more taxes as a percent of total taxes from commercial and industrial development than the City of Gardner, one of the region's urban centers. That Westminster has a substantial industrial/commercial tax base is the good news. The bad news is that over the last 25 years, the residential portion of the Town's tax base has increased from 73.1% in 1986 to 80.8% today. This means that residential development has been outpacing economic development and thus is accounting for a larger percentage of the Town's overall tax base. The end result is that Westminster homeowners have been shouldering an ever increasing portion of the Town's municipal budget and this partially explains the significant rise in the average single-family home tax bill during the last twenty-five years.

Table TG-4
Non-Education State Aid - Year 2012

<u>Westminster</u>	<u>Ashburnham</u>	<u>Hubbardston</u>	<u>Princeton</u>	<u>Gardner</u>	<u>Leominster</u>	<u>Fitchburg</u>
\$779,259	\$727,877	\$428,288	\$404,819	\$4,091,757	\$5,145,388	\$7,728,909

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue. Presented figures DO NOT include State education aid.

The table above indicates that Westminster and its more rural neighbors do not fare nearly as well as its urban neighbors in terms of Non-Education State Aid received; however, it should be noted that the primary purpose of State aid is to equalize municipal spending levels between "poor" and "wealthy" communities.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

Table TG-5
Non-Educational State Aid per Capita – Year 2012

<u>Westminster</u>	<u>Ashburnham</u>	<u>Hubbardston</u>	<u>Princeton</u>	<u>Gardner</u>	<u>Leominster</u>	<u>Fitchburg</u>
\$107.09	\$128.15	\$97.74	\$118.61	\$202.58	\$126.24	\$191.70

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue. Presented figures DO NOT include State education aid.

Based on socio-economic characteristics, it should come as no surprise that the urbanized communities of Fitchburg and Gardner have the highest per capita State aid figures of the compared communities. It should be noted that the State distribution formula is partially based on local median household income figures and other measures of wealth. For the compared communities, the urban cities have lower median household income figures (thus the high amount of State aid), while the rural communities have relatively high median household income figures (thus the lower amount of State aid).

Table TG-6
Percentage of Tax Dollars Spent on Education – Year 2012

<u>Westminster</u>	<u>Ashburnham</u>	<u>Hubbardston</u>	<u>Princeton</u>	<u>Gardner</u>	<u>Leominster</u>	<u>Fitchburg</u>
52.73%	54.10%	58.40%	60.18%	51.82%	58.36%	52.64%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

It should be noted that Ashburnham initiated a change in the school funding formula for the Ashburnham-Westminster School District in 2011 that Westminster did not support. In essence, the School District changed its funding formula from what was specified in the regional agreement (dividing up school costs based on each town's enrollment figures) to the State funding formula, which is based on a number of factors including the composition and valuation of each town's tax base. This change resulted in Westminster having to dedicate 1.5% more on school spending than it had in 2011, while Ashburnham saw its percentage of education spending drop by 1.5%. Thus, the 2011 change in the regional school funding formula resulted in Westminster having to devote more tax dollars towards education than it had in the past, meaning there were less tax dollars to spend on its municipal government.

In the Master Plan citizen survey from early 2011 (found in Appendix A), the respondents identified Westminster's high tax rate as the most undesirable aspect of living in Town. A comparison of Westminster's municipal spending against what its immediate neighbors are spending on municipal government validates this concern. Westminster has been spending substantially more than its neighbors to run its municipal government (see the table below).

Table TG-7
2012 Per Capita Funding for Local Government

<u>Westminster</u>	<u>Ashburnham</u>	<u>Hubbardston</u>	<u>Princeton</u>	<u>Gardner</u>	<u>Leominster</u>	<u>Fitchburg</u>
\$1,132	\$931	\$617	\$975	\$948	\$916	\$1,031

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

Table TG-8
Average Single Family Tax Bill 2000 through 2012

Community	2000 Average Tax Bill for Single Family Home	2012 Average Tax Bill for Single Family Home	% Increase 2000 - 2012
Ashburnham	\$2,068	\$3,757	+ 81.7%
Fitchburg	\$1,782	\$2,913	+ 63.5%
Gardner	\$1,773	\$2,864	+ 61.5%
Hubbardston	\$1,825	\$2,999	+ 64.3%
Leominster	\$2,088	\$3,640	+ 74.3%
Princeton	\$3,085	\$5,096	+65.2%
Westminster	\$2,083	\$3,989	+ 91.5%

Source: MA Department of Revenue.

Table TG-9
General Fund Expenditures Per Capita 2000 - 2012

Community	2000 Population	2000 Per Capita Expenditures	2012 Population	2012 Per Capita Expenditures	% Population Increase 2000 - 2012	% Per Capita Increase 2000 - 2012
Ashburnham	5,546	\$604	6,081	\$931	+9.6%	+ 54.1%
Fitchburg	39,102	\$1,069	43,343	\$1,031	+10.8	- 3.6%
Gardner	20,770	\$693	21,049	\$948	+1.3	+ 36.8%
Hubbardston	3,909	\$460	4,482	\$617	+14.7	+ 34.1%
Leominster	41,303	\$605	42,293	\$916	+2.4	+ 51.4%
Princeton	3,353	\$707	3,523	\$975	+0.5	+37.9%
Westminster	6,907	\$580	7,478	\$1,132	+8.3	+ 95.2%

Source: MA Department of Revenue. Please note that school-related expenditures are not included in this table.

The tables above indicate that Westminster is spending more on its municipal government than its neighbors and this has resulted in a sharp rise in the tax bills for single family homes. It should be noted that the data presented in these tables is not a one-time phenomenon. Westminster has routinely ranked at the top when compared to its neighbors in terms of spending on local government. While the data indicates that Westminster has been spending more on its municipal government than its neighbors, it needs to be remembered that not all municipalities have the same infrastructure or service needs, nor do they offer the same menu of services and programs. It should also be noted that Westminster has passed two Proposition 2 ½ overrides in the past decade, both for increased school funding.

DEPARTMENTAL SUMMARIES

The bulk of the material used for the ensuing departmental summaries was provided directly by the departments and staff. The Master Plan Committee would like to thank all of the municipal departments, boards, commissions and committees that provided data for this chapter.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

Department of Public Works

Organization: The Department of Public Works consists of four Divisions: Highway, Water, Sewer and Solid Waste. A three-member Public Works Commission manages the Public Works Department. The Commissioners are appointed by the Board of Selectmen to three-year terms. The Commission meets on a bi-monthly basis. There is a Director that is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Department and is appointed by the Commission.

Staff: The Department consists of seventeen full-time employees: the Director, a Highway Superintendent, ten highway employees, three employees assigned to water and sewer, and two administrative employees.

Budget: For the 2012 fiscal year, the Department had an operating budget of \$3,240,091, and this total includes the Town's Chapter 90 allotment from the State (\$418,647).

Facilities: DPW Offices and Highway Garage are located at 2 Oakmont Avenue. There are also two covered salt sheds at this location. The Highway Garage building is in good condition.

Equipment:

- 2010 Mack 6-wheel truck, good condition
- 2005 Mack 10-wheel truck, good condition
- 2007 Oshkosh MPT Truck, good condition
- 2009 Ford F350 pick-up truck, good condition
- 2006 Ford F350 pick-up truck, good condition
- 2006 Chevrolet 2500 pick-up truck, good condition
- 2005 Ford Explorer, good condition
- 2001 Ford F350 pick-up truck, fair condition
- 1999 Ford F550 pick-up truck, poor condition
- 2011 Ford F150 pick-up, excellent condition
- 1997 Ford F150 pick-up truck, poor condition
- 1995 Ford 6-wheel truck, poor condition
- 1997 Ford 6-wheel truck, fair/poor condition
- 1999 JCB backhoe, fair/poor condition
- 1992 Ford 6-wheel truck, fair condition
- 2009 Caterpillar excavator, good condition
- 2007 Flatbed trailer, good condition
- 2007 John Deere loader, good condition
- 2005 John Deere loader, good condition
- 1988 Ferguson paving roller, poor condition
- 2008 sidewalk tractor, good condition
- 1996 Galion grader, fair condition
- 1954 rock crusher, poor condition
- 2001 Ford Econo van, fair condition
- 2010 Elgin Pelican street sweeper, good condition
- 2001 New Holland brush mower, poor condition
- 2000 Lee Boy paver, fair condition
- 1978 Worthington compressor, poor condition

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

- Wacker Roller, poor condition
- Welder, fair condition
- 2003 chipper, good condition
- Sand/salt spreader, good condition
- 2004 sewer cleaning jet, good condition
- 2005 International water/sewer vehicle, good condition
- 2002 trailer, good condition

It is typical for the Department to use its Chapter 90 allotment from the State to fund vehicle replacement. The Town's Chapter 90 allotment has fluctuated considerably over the past decade, from a low of \$255,438 in fiscal year 2007, to a high of \$418,866 in fiscal year 2012.

DPW – Water Division:

Water System Description: The Town currently obtains water supply from the City of Fitchburg through an inter-municipal agreement (IMA). A copy of the Water IMA can be found here: <http://www.westminster-ma.gov/pages/mp/water.pdf>. The current IMA will expire upon the Regional Water Filtration Facility reaching the end of its useful life (sometime in 2031 - the facility has a design life of 30 years). The IMA was created to allow for the construction of the Regional Water Filtration Facility on Hager Park Road that went online in 2001. The treated water from the treatment plant is for distribution for both the City of Fitchburg and the Town of Westminster.

Prior to building the Regional Water Filtration Treatment Facility, the Town withdrew water from Meetinghouse Pond and provided limited chlorination and fluoridation treatment at the South Street Pump Station. The South Street Pump Station is currently an emergency backup source. The IMA allows the Town to obtain a maximum daily flow of 870,000 gallons per day (gpd) with the right to a maximum daily flow of up to 1,500,000 gpd. The costs to the Town for water supply include portions of the treatment facility capital costs as well as operations and management costs at the Facility. In 1951, Acts of Legislature were approved to allow the Town to use up to 100 million gallons of water per year from Meetinghouse Pond at no cost. The Acts of 1951 also required Westminster and Fitchburg to enter into an agreement as to the price to be paid by Westminster to Fitchburg for water used by Westminster in excess of the 100 million gallons per year. In 1971, an agreement with the Fitchburg requires Westminster to pay \$60.00 per million gallons used in excess over the 100 million gallons permitted by the Acts of 1951.

The total amount of water purchased annually from Fitchburg has increased by 77% from 2000 to 2011, from 79,235,700 gallons to 140,425,825 gallons, mostly due to new users getting connected to the water system. In 2011, the average daily demand was 384,728 gpd and the maximum daily demand was 770,839 gpd, both well below the maximum allowed by the IMA, meaning that capacity is not an issue regarding the municipal water system. On a per capita basis, Westminster residential water customers use an average of 49 gallons of water per person per day, well below the 65 gallons per person per day benchmark set by the State of Massachusetts Water Management Act of 2004.

The water supply is derived solely from surface water reservoirs owned and maintained by the City of Fitchburg, Meetinghouse Pond and Mare Meadow Reservoir in Westminster and Bickford Pond in Hubbardston. The City of Fitchburg currently owns 1,557 acres of land around Meetinghouse Pond and Mare Meadow Reservoir for the purpose of water supply protection. Meetinghouse Pond has a safe yield of 1.03 million gallons per day (mgd) and Mare Meadow Reservoir has a safe yield of 2.50 mgd.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

Treated water is delivered to the Hager Park Pump Station adjacent to the Water Treatment Facility. The Hager Park Pump Station delivers water to the Westminister distribution system. The Westminister Water Department operates and maintains the system which consists of approximately thirty-five linear miles of water pipes, four pressure reducing valves and two water storage tanks. The distribution system was constructed in 1955, with additional extensions in the 1960's and 1970's, and small additions since then. There are approximately 1,170 customers connected to the system. The Department also provides water to two small water districts in Town, Leino Park and Holmes Park. Water lines extend through the Town covering portions of Route 2A, Hager Park Road, Route 140, Village Inn Road, Carter Road, Dawley Road, Overlook Road, Simplex Drive, North Common Road, Ellis Road, South Street, Main Street, West Main Street and the Town Center area. For a graphic depiction of the Water System Service Area, please refer to the Municipal Infrastructure Map at the end of this chapter. Each Westminister water customer has their use metered and billing is done by the Westminister Water Division.

One water supply concern is the 23 miles of concrete/asbestos pipes that are part of the municipal water system. Corrosives in the soil will eventually cause some of these pipes to fail, causing disruption to the system. The Water Division is planning to start replacing the majority of these pipes and this will be a multi-year effort. In 2012, the Water Division conducted a leak detection survey and found no leaks, but the threat remains because of the materials used to make the pipes and their tendency to corrode over time.

DPW – Sewer Division:

Sewer System Description: Municipal sewage collection is a relatively new phenomenon in Westminister. In 1971 the MA Water Resources Commission determined that Round Meadow Pond was being polluted by development in the Town Center area through wastewater discharges to storm drains that discharged to the pond. To address this issue, the Town hired SEA Consultants in 1975 and they prepared a Report on Wastewater Collection and Disposal Facilities. This report proposed a phased sewer line installation program with the priority areas being the Town Center and around Wyman Pond. However, the report concluded that it was not economically feasible at the time to provide sewers to Wyman Pond and it was also noted that the Nashua River Basin Plan prohibited new discharges into the Whitman River, regardless of quality, which effectively eliminated in town sewage treatment as an option. A subsequent study prepared by DuFresne-Henry in 1982 (Facilities Planning Report for Wastewater Collection and Treatment Facilities) concluded that transporting wastewater from the Town Center area to the West Fitchburg Treatment Plant was the optimal solution.

In 1983 the Town entered into an inter-municipal agreement (IMA) with the City of Fitchburg to send wastewater collected by the Town wastewater collection system to Fitchburg for treatment and disposal. The IMA was amended in 1991, 1995 and 1998 to increase the allowable amount of flow discharged to Fitchburg and to add an additional connection to the Fitchburg sewer system. Copies of the 1983 IMA and subsequent iterations can be found here: <http://www.westminster-ma.gov/pages/mp/sewerIMA.pdf>.

The current IMA allows the Town to discharge up to 320,000 gallons per day (gpd) to Fitchburg. There are two sewer discharge points to Fitchburg, one on Route 2A/State Road East and the other on Route 31/Fitchburg Road. The Town is allowed to discharge 250,000 gpd at the Route 2A/State Road East discharge point and 70,000 gpd at the Route 31/Fitchburg Road discharge point, for a total sewer discharge capacity of 320,000 gpd. All wastewater in Town is treated and disposed of at Fitchburg's East Treatment Plant. The total amount of sewer discharged annually to Fitchburg has increased by 46% from 2000 to 2011, from 41,562,680 gallons to

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

60,721,768 gallons. On average, the Town currently sends approximately 168,000, gpd to the City of Fitchburg, although the daily flow can be as much as 280,000 gpd, which is getting close to the system's total discharge capacity of 320,000. The IMA is valid until the year 2020. An extension may be negotiated one year prior to termination. On a per capita basis, Westminster sewer customers generate an average of 63 gallons of wastewater per person per day. Readers will note that the per capita wastewater figure (63 gallons per day) is higher than the per capita water figure (49 gallons per day). This is due to the sewer system's serious inflow/infiltration problems which are described in more detail below.

The original sewer system in Westminster was constructed in 1982 by the Wachusett Mountain Ski Area which was expanding and in need of service. The ski area connected to the Fitchburg sewer system and installed sewer pipes along Route 2A, Depot Road, Narrows Road, Stone Hill Road, East Road, Gatehouse Road and Mile Hill Road. The Whitman River Pump Station was installed to convey wastewater over the Whitman River and into Fitchburg. The Narrows Road Pump Station was also installed to convey wastewater over Route 2. In 1984 the Town extended the recently built interceptor sewer along Route 2A/State Road East to provide service to the Town Center area and a limited amount of sewer lines were constructed along the eastern side of Wyman Pond. Between 1989 and 1998 several small extensions were constructed by various users including Simplex-Grinnell along Simplex Drive and Pinetree Power along Route 31/Fitchburg Road. Since then, sewer lines have been expanded further along Route 2 in the Town Center area as well as the Wyman Pond area, Ellis Road, Frog Hollow Road, Scenic Drive and Main Street. For a graphic depiction of the Sewer System Service Area, please refer to the Municipal Infrastructure Map at the end of this chapter.

The sewer collection system consists of approximately 17 miles of sewer pipes and includes seven pumping stations, gravity lines, and force mains. The system serves 730 customers. There are two distinct service areas in Westminster: the Whitman River area is the larger of the two and covers the Town Center area, and the Route 31 area is the smaller. Wastewater from Westminster is sent to the Fitchburg East sewage treatment plant that discharges treated wastewater to the Nashua River.

Since 2003, the system has been under a sewer connection moratorium due to the Whitman River Pumping Station exceeding its capacity during peak flow events. The moratorium prevents newly created lots from connecting to sewer as well as sewer extensions. Since 2009, the Department has been investigating infiltration/inflow (I/I) in the sewer system. The system's rate of I/I currently stands at approximately 40% and this represents a serious problem. Inflow is caused by direct connections to the sewer system from roof drains, sump pumps and any other water source directly discharging into a sewer line without the Department's knowledge. Infiltration is essentially groundwater infiltrating into the sewer pipes or manholes. We suspect a majority of the I/I is from inflow sources. I/I in the sewer system is using up capacity at the Whitman River Pumping Station. This increases operational costs at the pumping station as well as costs to send this non-sewer flow to the City of Fitchburg for treatment. This in turn prohibits the sewer system from allowing new service connections.

A Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan (CWMP) was completed for the Town in 2007 by SEA Consultants Inc. The CWMP recommended extending the sewer collection system to several areas in Town, including Leino Park, Lakewood Park, Dawley Road, Lake Drive East, Edro Isle, Bakers Grove, East Wyman, Bacon Street and the State Road East Industrial Area. To accommodate the increase in wastewater flows, the Whitman River Pumping Station would have to be upgraded as well as sewer piping within the City of Fitchburg. Once the various extensions and upgrades are completed, the sewered areas will represent the Town's definitive municipal sewer service area.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

DPW – Highway Division:

Highway System Description: There are approximately 114 total road miles in Westminster, with the Highway Division being responsible for maintaining 87 road miles. Approximately 80 miles are paved/surface-treated and 7 miles are gravel. The State is responsible for maintaining 17 road miles: State Roads East and West (Route 2A), Main Street (Route 2A), Route 2 and Route 12. There are also 10 miles of private/unaccepted subdivision roads in Town that are the responsibility of the homeowners that abut the roads and/or the developers of the subdivisions. Private roads, other than the subdivision roads owned by a developer, are plowed in the winter by the Division. In 1973 the Town voted to accept the provisions of MGL Chapter 40, Section 6C, which allows the Town to appropriate money for the removal of snow and ice from private ways.

Duties: The Division's primary responsibility is road maintenance for the approximately 87 miles of roadways in Town, not including those roads maintained by the State. The duties generally include drainage repair/replacement (catch basins and culverts), catch basin cleaning, street sweeping, roadside mowing, sign replacement and/or installation, pot hole repairs, crack sealing, road reclaiming or reconstruction, road sealing, grading of gravel roads, repair/replacement of sidewalks, snow plowing and sanding, rubbish removal from sides of roads, tree and brush pruning/removal, traffic/crosswalk/stop bar line painting and several other items related to maintaining the Town's roadways.

In 1996, the department hired a consultant to implement a Pavement Management System (PMS). The PMS has been updated over the years to reflect the condition of Town roads. The PMS is a tool that enables the Division to make consistent and cost effective decisions for preservation of Town roads. Using a PMS, each road mile is evaluated to identify its pavement condition, which is then assigned a Pavement Condition Index (PCI), which is essentially a numeric grade. Generally speaking, a town's road network would need a PCI rating of 80 to be considered in "fair" condition. The most recent PMS evaluation of Westminster's road network from 2010 indicates an overall PCI rating of 69, a condition considered "deficient". However, PCI ratings between 60 and 70 are typical for rural communities in Massachusetts.

It should be noted that Westminster has made a concerted effort to address the deficiencies of its road network by allocating road maintenance funds above and beyond the State's annual Chapter 90 road maintenance allocation. Since 2006, the Town has voted to appropriate \$500,000 annually for road maintenance, an amount the Division believes to be an acceptable minimum to maintain the road system in its current condition. However, this figure was reduced to \$400,000 in 2012 and further reduced to \$200,000 in 2013. While the last two years have seen a reduction in road maintenance funding due to concerns with the Town's overall operating budget, the need for additional road maintenance funding remains. Unless the Department starts using a larger portion of its annual Chapter 90 funding allotment for road maintenance purposes, the Town will need to increase its road maintenance budget to \$750,000 per year for the next ten years in order for Westminster to raise its PCI road network rating from 71 to 80, or what is considered a "fair" rating for its road network. The Town's most recent Pavement Management Study can be found here: <http://www.westminster-ma.gov/pages/mp/PavementManagementStudy.pdf>.

DPW – Solid Waste Division:

Solid Waste Description: In 2006, a Solid Waste Drop-Off Center was opened at 165 Fitchburg Road/Route 31 for the use by Town residents only. The Drop-Off Center is owned and operated by Resource Control Inc. (RCI) a.k.a. Waste Management. RCI is responsible for enforcing all waste bans on disposal and transfer of municipal solid waste that are adopted by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. Throughout the

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

duration of RCI's operations at the Fitchburg-Westminster Landfill, RCI will transfer from the Drop-Off Center all collected Town acceptable solid waste for disposal at no cost. Homeowners also have the option of arranging for curbside pickup for a fee through private waste disposal companies. The Town pays RCI a monthly fee to operate the Drop-Off Center. In addition, the Town is not charged for the curbside collection of recyclables from residential properties throughout the duration of RCI's landfilling operations at the Fitchburg-Westminster Landfill. The estimated date for the closure of the Fitchburg-Westminster Landfill is 2026, at which point the Drop-Off Center will be turned over to the Town.

The current IMA in place between Westminster, Fitchburg and RCI is valid until the landfill reaches capacity. The parties can begin renegotiating the IMA a year in advance of expiration. A copy of the solid waste IMA can be found here: <http://www.westminster-ma.gov/pages/mp/SolidWasteIMA.pdf>.

Items brought to the Drop-Off Center include normal household trash (including furniture), yard waste (leaves and brush), construction debris, recycling (batteries, scrap metal, waste motor oil, corrugated cardboard, paper and comingled containers). Appliances containing Freon, tires, TV's, mattresses and propane tanks can be dropped off for a fee. A paint shed is available from April through October for latex and oil base paints for swap. There is a universal waste storage area for waste fluorescent light bulbs/mercury products and antifreeze. The Highway Department transports to the Fitchburg-Westminster Landfill all street sweepings and catch basin collections at no cost.

Issues Facing the Public Works Department:

- The current location of the DPW headquarters is surrounded by water resource areas. There is a need for Town sewer at this location, a vehicle wash station and a building to cover the winter sand/salt pile.
- The majority of the water system in Town has reached the end of its design life. The Department is planning on implementing a water main replacement program over the next decade.
- There is a need for sewer expansion in Town as described in the 2007 CWMP. The Department has investigated the feasibility of treating sanitary sewage in Town, rather than conveying it to the City of Fitchburg for treatment, but this option is cost prohibitive. If the Town continues to convey wastewater to the City of Fitchburg, it will need to negotiate a new inter-municipal agreement (IMA) sometime prior to 2019. The Department of Public Works is currently evaluating two options for addressing the Town's sewer capacity issue:

1) In-Line Sewer Storage Station: DPW's primary option for addressing the sewer capacity issue is to construct an in-line sewer storage station in the vicinity of the Whitman River. The design for the station is complete and, once built, it will be able to accommodate peak flows and provide the ability for the Town to add flows from the Phase I, II and V sewer expansion areas outlined in the Town's Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan. This design would prevent the Town from having to significantly alter the existing Whitman River Pump Station, force main and downstream piping systems. The project replaces an existing 18-inch influent gravity sewer upstream at the existing Whitman River Pump Station with an 850 foot long in-line "storage tank", which is basically a box culvert with a 4x8 internal dimension. The cost of this option is currently estimated at approximately 2.25 million dollars.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

2) Three-Barrel Siphon: A second option would be to eliminate the Whitman River pump station and replace with a three-barrel siphon under the Whitman River, as well as replace and increase the diameter of the existing gravity sewer to Fitchburg. At a cost of approximately five million dollars, this option would enable the Town to initiate all phases of the sewer expansion plan the outlined in the Town's Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan, and provide system capacity that could accommodate up to 50 years of new development.

The Town is currently searching for grants that could help fund one of these options.

- Funding for road maintenance of Town roads continues to be an issue. The Department believes it needs \$500,000 as the minimum cost for maintaining the Town's road system at its current condition. However, budget considerations have resulted in the Department asking for \$400,000 for road maintenance in 2012, and \$200,000 in 2013. There is a need to increase the road maintenance budget to stay ahead of the Town's aging roadway network. The Town's most recent Pavement Management Study estimated that Westminster would need to devote \$750,000 per year for the next ten years in order to bring its road network up to what is considered "fair" condition. Costs of roadway materials and construction have been increasing every year. As an example, the cost of placing pavement has gone from \$25 per ton in 1999 to \$61 per ton in 2011.
- The estimated closing date of the Fitchburg-Westminster landfill in 2026 poses the question of where and how the Town will dispose of its trash and at what cost. Adding to this cost will be the disposal of street sweepings and catch basin cleanings.

Upcoming Capital Needs (all items listed in the Town's Capital Improvement Plan except those denoted as "not yet scheduled"):

Highway Division

- Sand/Salt shed – FY2014/2015, raise and appropriate/stabilization or use Chapter 90 funds.
- Vehicle wash station – not yet scheduled, raise and appropriate/stabilization.
- Garage addition – not yet scheduled, raise and appropriate/stabilization or Chapter 90 funds.
- Route 140 culvert replacement at Mile Hill Road – not yet scheduled, raise and appropriate/ stabilization or Chapter 90 funds.
- Grader with plow – FY2022, raise and appropriate/stabilization and/or Chapter 90 funds.
- Sidewalk tractor – FY2019, raise and appropriate/stabilization.
- Loader 1 with plow – FY2021, raise and appropriate/stabilization and/or Chapter 90 funds.
- Loader 2 with plow – FY2023, raise and appropriate/stabilization and/or Chapter 90 funds.
- Paver – FY2021, raise and appropriate/stabilization or Chapter 90 funds.
- Pavement roller 1 – FY2019, raise and appropriate/stabilization or Chapter 90 funds.
- Pavement roller 2 – FY2015, raise and appropriate/stabilization or Chapter 90 funds.
- 6-wheel dump truck 1 with sander and plow – FY2013, raise and appropriate/stabilization.
- 6-wheel dump truck 2 with sander and plow – FY2015, raise and appropriate/stabilization.
- 6-wheel dump truck 3 with sander and plow – FY2016, raise and appropriate/stabilization.
- 10-wheel dump truck with sander and plow – FY2023, raise and appropriate/stabilization.
- Backhoe loader – FY2022, raise and appropriate/stabilization or Chapter 90 funds.
- Compressor – FY2014, raise and appropriate/stabilization or Chapter 90 funds.
- Brush mower – FY2014, raise and appropriate/stabilization or Chapter 90 funds.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

- Street sweeper – FY2021, raise and appropriate/stabilization or Chapter 90 funds.
- Trailer – FY2018, raise and appropriate/stabilization.
- Pick-up truck 1 (1 ton) with plow – FY2016, raise and appropriate/stabilization.
- Pick-up truck 2 (1 ton) with plow – FY2015, raise and appropriate/stabilization.
- Pick-up truck 3 (1/2 ton) with plow – FY2022, raise and appropriate/stabilization.
- Pick-up truck 4 (2 ton) with sander and plow – FY2014, raise and appropriate/stabilization.

Sewer Division

- Address the sewer system's capacity issue – choose a preferred option, secure design/construction funding (combination of grant money, sewer enterprise fund, betterments and general fund subsidy), construct preferred option.
- Pump station upgrades: Val Road (2014), Wachusett Drive (2015), and Narrows Road (2015), sewer enterprise fund.

Water Division

- Water line replacement/upgrades – start FY2013, water enterprise fund.
- Ellis Road storage tank replacement – replace tank within the next ten years using a combination of funds from the water enterprise fund and general fund subsidy.
- SUV – FY2016, water and sewer enterprise fund and raise & appropriate/stabilization.
- Van – FY2014, water and sewer enterprise fund.
- Pick-up truck 1 (1 ton) with plow – FY2020, water and sewer enterprise fund.
- Pick-up truck 2 (3/4 ton) – FY2017, water and sewer enterprise fund.
- Goodrich Drive water tank rehabilitation (relining the concrete inside and outside) – within the next ten years, water enterprise fund.

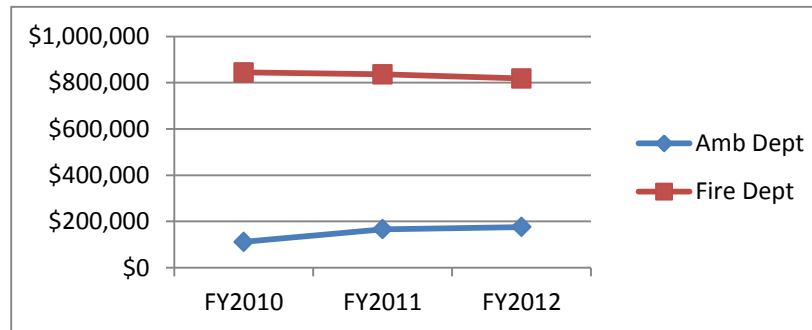
Fire Department

Organization: The Board of Selectmen shall appoint the Fire Chief in accordance with Massachusetts General Law Chapter 48, Section 42, which is known as the "Strong Fire Chief" statute. The Chief is responsible for appointments of all department personnel and has full and absolute authority in the administration of the department and makes all rules and regulations for its operation. He shall report to the selectmen from time to time as they may require and shall provide an annual report to the town on the condition of the department with his recommendations. The Chief is also appointed yearly by the selectmen to serve as the Forest Warden under Massachusetts General Law Chapter 48, Section 43, and may appoint Deputy Forest Wardens.

Budget: The Fire Department's operating budget for fiscal year 2012 was \$839,388. The Department also augments the budget with grants and donations.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

Table TG-10
Fire & Ambulance Service Funding



Staff: Full-time staffing consists of the Fire Chief, Fire Captain, Department Administrator, and six (6) firefighters. The full-time staffers are all required to be Emergency Medical Technicians with the Chief, Captain, and Administrator at the Basic level and Firefighters at the Paramedic level. The Chief, Captain, and Administrator work a standard 40 hour work week. The firefighters work a rotating schedule consisting of 10 hour days and 14 hour nights that average to a 42 hour work week. There are two groups of two and two groups of one for a total of 4 groups. The two groups of one have a per-diem firefighter work with them to augment their groups so there are two firefighters on duty twenty-four (24) hours a day, seven (7) days a week to provide services and initial response to emergencies. There are currently fifteen (15) paid on-call firefighters that are called into service anytime the two duty personnel are not able to handle the situation or when they are transporting to the hospital with the ambulance to provide station coverage.

Services: The Department's primary responsibilities are fire suppression and emergency responses. The Department also serves as the Town's Emergency Management Agency for responding to natural and man-made disasters. The Department also provides the following additional services:

- Emergency Medical Ambulance Transport at Advanced Life Support (ALS) level
- Fire, Child, and Elder Safety Education
- Fire Prevention
- Code Compliance Enforcement
- Event Safety Review
- Rescues of the public and their pets
- Hazardous Materials
- Specialized Community Services

History: At the May 2, 1825 Town Meeting the town voted Article 3 to form the fire department with engineers. On August 11, 1825 the fire department was formed with 21 Engineers. A group of citizens tried to purchase a hand-pumper to protect the center of town but ran short of funds and at the November 26, 1826 Town Meeting the Town voted the additional \$35.00 to finish the purchase.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

The initial hand-pumper was hand drawn and had to be filled with buckets of water to fight the fire. In 1849 the Town purchased its first drafting hand-pumper, commonly known as the “Always Ready.” This apparatus allowed fires to be fought by using the Town’s cistern on Main Street without having to use bucket brigades to fill the tub. The Town purchased a number of other hand-pumpers and smaller pieces of equipment all being horse drawn but the Town never owned its own horses and would pay to have local horses brought to the station at the time of alarm. The first motorized fire apparatus purchased by the Town was a 1919 Model T Ford and by the end of the 1920’s hand-pumpers were only used for competition.

On March 2, 1835 the Town accepted a State law that provided that engine crews need be 30 men strong and that they be compensated the amount equal to the Poll Tax. The Poll Tax was abated as compensation to the firefighters from 1844 through 1869 when the Poll Tax was abolished. After the Poll Tax was abolished the firefighters continued to receive compensation from the Town at a salary of \$5.00 per year. During the early 1900’s firefighters were compensated with the annual salary and an hourly rate. During early 2000 the salary was eliminated and only an hourly wage exists.

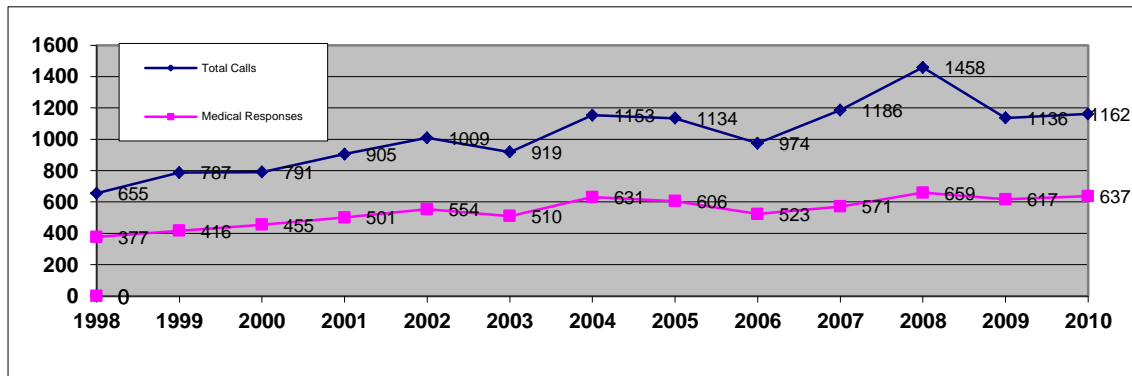
The “Engine House”, which is referred to as the building that houses the fire engine was initially located on what is now known as Church Street behind the Baptist Church and was later moved to a building on Main Street to the left of the Universalist Church. This building was later lowered to allow for motorized apparatus to more easily access the building. This building being too small for the number and size of apparatus the fire department temporarily stored engines at the Department of Public Works on South Street until 1956 when the fire station was built across the street. In 1994 this building was added on to and now comprises the Public Safety Facility for the Fire, Police, and Emergency Management.

Due to the size of the Town and various developments that went on from time to time, other fire substations were put up and older apparatus would be sent to these locations to protect that area of the community. The earliest one was at the Town Meeting on November 14, 1842 when the Forbush Station was authorized. The Forbush section of Town is now known as Whitmanville. Other stations in Town were at South Westminster or also referred to as Steam Valley on what is now known as Spruce Road and protected the Merriam Chair Factory. Another fire station was located at Wachusettville that protected the paper mills on Narrows Road.

Facility: The Fire Department is located at 7 South Street in the south central part of Town, where the populous center has historically been. With the Town’s 37 square mile area and 11 miles north to south and only 5 miles east to west the fire department is one of a few fire departments in the State with one fire station for the number of square miles covered. The original Fire Station was originally built in 1956, and its last addition was in 1994 for the purpose of providing additional apparatus space. However, at this point in time, the facility has insufficient storage, office, and living space. Since 1994, the Department has had duty firefighters on around the clock and the station lacks the accommodations now needed. The Department also lacks the type of storage space needed for storage of equipment and records.

Mutual Aid: The Department is a member of the Mid-State Fire Mutual Aid Association that generally covers what is known as Massachusetts Fire District 8 (Northern Worcester County). The Department also participates in the State-wide fire mobilization plan and the Massachusetts Ambulance Taskforce.

Table TG-11
Emergency Responses



Department Equipment: The Department attempts to replace a piece of equipment after 25 years of service. Large-scale equipment purchases are funded through Town Meeting warrant articles and are scheduled in the Town's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The Department buys equipment outright and does not lease. With the purchase of a second ambulance, the Department is looking to change the way it delivers rescue service. Merging the functionality of its Rescue Truck with a replacement pumper for Engine 4 into a combination Rescue/Pumper, will streamline services and reduce one vehicle that needs to be maintained. All hoses are regularly tested and defective hoses are taken out of service or repaired. Fire pumps as well as Fire Ladders have been tested and certified to meet original specifications and repaired as needed. SCBA (Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus), along with the compressed air we put in the bottles, are also tested each year.

In terms of vehicles, the Department currently utilizes the following:

- Rescue Truck (R1) (2000) American LaFrance. This vehicle provides EMS (Emergency Medical Services) and Fire Rescue services. It currently serves as a back-up ambulance.
- Ambulance 1 (A1) (2007 Ford Ambulance) Horton.
- Engine 1 (E1) (1999 Class A pumper) KME. It carries 1000 gallons of water and Class B foam to fight flammable liquid fires.
- Engine 2 (E2) (2001 Class A pumper) KME. It carries 2500 gallons of water and has a Class "A" foam system that doubles the rate of fire suppression. This vehicle is also capable of operating as a tanker by performing water shuttles.
- Engine 4 (E4) (1990 Class A Pumper) KME. It carries 1000 gallons of water.
- Tower 1 (T1) (2005 Ladder Truck) KME 95 foot aerial ladder with tower bucket and 300 gallons of water and 2000 GPM pump.
- Engine 5 (E5) (2008 Mini-Pumper) CET. Engine 5 is a multi-purpose vehicle that is used year-round to respond to all outdoor fires and its size and weight allow it to be the initial structural fire response for those areas in Town like Leino Park where bridge weight restrictions require the larger apparatus to take back roads that are not suited for ease of response. The vehicle carries 300 gallons of water and compressed air foam and is 4-wheel drive.
- Utility Vehicles: The Department has three utility vehicles: Car 1 (2008, Chief's car) is designed to be an emergency response vehicle and the primary command vehicle. Car 2 (2003, Duty Officer's car) is designed to be an emergency response vehicle and the secondary command vehicle when Car 1 is not available. Car 3 (2007) is used as a utility pick-up truck.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

- **Trailered Vehicles:** The Department has four trailered vehicles, a covered trailer for hazardous materials response equipment and supplies, a flatbed trailer for hauling equipment, a rescue boat and a rescue hovercraft.
- **Radio Equipment:** The UHF radio system is in good condition. All firefighters have UHF portable radios and pagers for their safety. The Department maintains a Low-band radio system as a back-up and communications system for alerting and all communications on UHF are repeated on Low-Band. The public wishing to listen to us can tune their scanner to either 460.1625 or 33.96 both with a PL of 127.3
- **Breathing Apparatus:** The breathing apparatus are fully compliant and inspected/tested yearly.

Upcoming Equipment, Facility and Staffing Needs:

- **Combined Replacement of E4 & R1:** Since purchasing R1, the Department has moved its EMS services to an ambulance-based service versus a first responder service. This has resulted in moving forward with two ambulances in the future and moving the Class V ambulance license from the Rescue to Ambulance 2. Therefore the Rescue is now strictly a rescue and does not provide EMS as its main function. In order to streamline services the Department recommends that the R1 and E4 be replaced at the same time with a combination Rescue/Pumper.
- **Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) Bottle Replacement:** The SCBA bottles are carbon wrapped and have to be replaced in 15 years from date of manufacturing. These bottles were manufactured in 1999 which results in the bottles needing to be replaced in 2014. The money for their replacement will be requested at the Annual Town Meeting in May of 2014, with purchasing occurring out of FY15 article funds. The Department has 28 SCBA packs with bottles and 32 spare bottles for a total of 60 bottles with a cost estimated to be \$1,200 per bottle for a total article cost at Town Meeting estimated to be \$72,000.
- **Address Space Needs:** There is more than one way to address the Fire Department's future space needs. The Department has suggested in the past the building of a full dormer on the southern end of the building, which would allow additional living and storage space. The Department has also agreed with the Public Safety Building Needs Committee that if the Police Department received their own building, the remaining space at the Public Safety Facility would meet the Fire Department's needs for many years to come. Lastly, the Department has also suggested that building a substation in the Whitmanville area on Town-owned land at the intersection of Whitmanville Road and South Ashburnham Road would allow for storage to free up space at the Public Safety facility for living space.
- **Future Whitmanville Station:** As noted above, the Department has sufficient challenges in delivering our services out of one station to 37 square miles, which has resulted in a 20-minute response time to the northern part of Town. The Town owns a parcel of land at the intersection of Whitmanville Road and South Ashburnham Road that is suitable for a small station in the future to cover the growing demands of this end of Town. Space problems at the South Street location could be alleviated by building a Whitmanville substation. The Department would like to see this station built in the next 10 years.
- **Staffing needs:** The Department has historically delivered its services through paid on-call firefighters, but as the Town grew and society changed, fewer people in the community looked to be an on-call firefighter. This decline in on-call firefighters is a national problem, and along with increased State Laws, has necessitated the hiring of full-time personnel. In 2010 the Department recruited six people from Town that wanted to be on-call firefighters, two of which dropped out within a couple of months.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

Four recruits completed the six month of training consisting of two weeknights and every other Saturday. Of the four that graduated, three did not respond when needed and did not attend subsequent training and were eventually let go. Only one from the original six recruits succeeded in being a contributing member of the Department. There are many socioeconomic reasons for the decline, but without sufficient call firefighters to handle labor intensive emergencies, the Department's current staffing will not be sufficient. This will result in the need for more full-time firefighters to address the needs of the community, and will come at a cost to taxpayers. In order to not grow the cost of firefighting, residents are encouraged to learn more about what it would take to be the next generation of on-call firefighter. Click on this link to learn more about becoming an on-call firefighter in Westminster: http://www.westminster-ma.gov/Pages/WestminsterMA_Fire/join

Police Department

Organization: The Board of Selectmen appoints the Police Chief, who is responsible for the Department's administration including the appointment of all personnel. The Chief reports to the Selectmen from time to time as they may require and submits an annual report to the Town on the condition of the Department along with recommendations.

Budget: The Police Department's operating budget for fiscal year 2012 was \$1,556,631. The Department's budget receives a very modest amount of support from two State grants: the Governor's Highway Safety program, which provides funding for traffic enforcement, car seats and seatbelt enforcement, and the Executive Office of Public Safety's Nine-One-One program, which provides funding for training and equipment of dispatch personnel.

Staff: In addition to the Chief, the Department has 12 full-time officers, 3 part-time officers, one full-time and one part-time administrative staff (clerical support), four full-time dispatchers and four part-time dispatchers, and two part-time crossing guards. All of the officers are certified in First Aid and CPR. There are usually two police officers on duty during the daytime hours. Animal control services are contracted out to a private vendor and are shared with the Towns of Ashburnham and Winchendon.

Equipment:

- Eight Cruisers (one for the Police Chief, one for the Lieutenant, one for the Animal Control Officer, One that is used by the Animal Control Officer shared with Ashburnham, and the remaining four are patrol vehicles):
 - 2011 Dodge Charger in excellent condition
 - 2009 Dodge Charger in fair condition
 - 2010 Chevy Tahoe in good condition
 - 2011 Ford Taurus in good condition
 - 2010 Ford Crown Victoria in fair condition
 - 2009 Ford Crown Victoria in good condition
 - 2008 Ford Crown Victoria in fair condition
 - 2004 Ford Expedition in poor condition
- 2010 Polaris All-terrain vehicle, excellent condition
- 2007 Radar trailer, good condition
- 2002 Utility trailer, good condition
- 2009 Electronic message board, good condition
- 2009 Light tower trailer, good condition

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

The Department recommends replacing a cruiser usually after three years of service.

Facility: The Police Department shares the Public Safety Complex on South Street with the Fire Department. Originally built in 1956 and substantially rehabbed in 1994, this building is on the verge of reaching the end of its useful life, but through proper maintenance, the building remains in fair condition. With both departments and the local dispatch center sharing the facility (which includes a lock-up facility), the building is at maximum capacity and there is little in the way of meeting or storage space. There is a new animal holding facility at the Wachusett Animal Hospital that the Animal Control Officer uses for holding stray animals.

Trends and Comparisons: According to the 2012 Annual Town Report, the Department responded a total of 10,277 service calls. The Department recorded a high of 11,662 responses in 2008, and this has steadily declined over the past four years. In 2000, the Department responded to 4,318 service calls and this number steadily rose during the last decade before peaking in 2008. The Department made 78 arrests in 2012, a significant decrease from the 187 arrests it made in 2008. The number of arrests made annually has fluctuated dramatically over the years. For instance, the Department made 169 arrests in 2000, but only 29 in 2004.

Upcoming Capital Needs: The Police Department's most pressing need for the next decade will be a new facility. The Department has tentatively identified a property near Hagar Park and the wastewater treatment plant that could accommodate a new Police Department headquarters, but this effort has languished these past few years. The Department plans on reviving its discussions with the Public Safety Building Needs Committee in an effort to move forward with building a new headquarters at this location. In terms of vehicle replacement, the Department plans to replace its vehicles as follows:

2011 Dodge Charger – replace in fiscal year 2016
2010 Chevy Tahoe - replace in fiscal year 2015
2011 Ford Taurus - replace in fiscal year 2015
2009 Ford Crown Victoria - replace in fiscal year 2014
2010 Polaris all-terrain vehicle - replace in fiscal year 2020
2007 Radar trailer – replace in fiscal year 2017
2009 Electronic message board – replace in fiscal year 2016
2009 Light tower trailer – replace in fiscal year 2016

Land Use Boards:

Westminster has four entities that review, approve and monitor new development: the Planning Board with assistance from the Town Planner, Zoning Board of Appeals, Conservation Commission, and the Building/Code Enforcement Department.

Planning Board: The Board currently consists of five members that are elected to three-year terms. The Board receives assistance from the Town Planner on three tasks: day-to-day management of the Board's caseload, writing new and amending existing zoning provisions and regulations, and long-range planning. The Board and the Planner do not have any clerical support. For fiscal year 2012, the Board had a budget of \$1,000 to cover advertising costs, postage, printing, training and professional development. The Board reviews and endorses Approval Not Required (ANR) plans, which constitute the majority of newly created lots in Westminster. The Board also reviews and approves subdivision plans and site plan review applications. The Board also serves as the Special Permit Granting Authority (SPGA) for commercial-scale wind power facilities, adult uses and cluster housing developments.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

Zoning Board of Appeals: The Board of Selectmen appoint the members of the Zoning Board and each member serves a three year term. The Board currently consists of three members and one associate member, with three associate member positions being vacant at present. The Zoning Board receives a few hours a week of part-time clerical support. The Board's operating budget for fiscal year 2012 was \$2,100. The Board meets on the third Thursday of every month. Its primary duties include hearing petitions for variances to the Zoning Bylaw (both use and dimensional variances), non-conforming uses and appeals of Planning Board and Building Inspector Commissioner decisions, mostly permit denials. The Board also serves as the Special Permit Granting Authority for a variety of uses including wireless communication facilities, apartment buildings, hospitals and nursing homes, veterinary clinics and kennels, gas stations and auto repair shops, and accessory uses.

Conservation Commission: The Commission consists of seven members that are appointed by the Board of Selectmen to three-year terms. The Commission has part-time clerical support, about 10 hours a week. The Conservation Agent is part-time and also averages 10 hours a week. For the 2012 Fiscal Year, the Commission had an operating budget of roughly \$20,191. The Commission's primary duty is administration of the State's wetland protection and rivers protection acts. The Commission is also responsible for managing an increasing number of Conservation properties (23 parcels at present). The majority of these properties receive no active management and the Commission addresses their property needs upon receiving citizen requests. The Commission has been engaged in a multi-year timber harvesting project at Muddy Pond and has retained a professional environmental consultant for assistance with this effort. The Commission also coordinates trail planning with the Mid-State Trail Association and land protection efforts with the North County Land Trust. The Commission believes it will need to increase the hours of its Conservation Agent to keep pace with the Committee's ever expanding workload.

Building Department: The Board of Selectmen is responsible for appointing the inspectors that make up the Building Department. The Department had an operating budget of \$139, 065 for the 2012 fiscal year. The Building Commissioner/Code Enforcement Officer is a part-time position (a minimum of 18 hours a week, but more if needed). The Department receives 30 hours a week of clerical support. There are two Local Inspectors that operate on an as-needed basis, and a part-time Plumbing and Gas Inspector (20 hours a week). The Wiring Inspector puts in an average of 25 to 30 hours a week and is paid by a stipend. While the Department's staffing level is adequate to address today's level of building activity, an increase in staff/hours may be necessary should the Town experience a building boom similar to the one that occurred in the first half of the last decade (2000 to 2006).



WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

Forbush Memorial Library:

Organization: The Library is a department of Town Government and is administered by an elected six-person Board of Library Trustees that serves three-year terms. The Board's authority is derived from Chapter 78, Section 10 and 11 of the Massachusetts General Laws. The Trustees meet monthly. The Trustees have delegated the responsibility for the library personnel management, collection development and provision of library services to the Library Director. The Director is appointed by the Board of Trustees, and is an employee of the Town. The Library is open for forty two (42) hours a week: from 10AM to 8PM Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10AM to 6PM on Fridays, and 9AM to 1PM on Saturdays.

Staff: The Library staff consists of five full-time and five part-time employees: The library director and children's librarian work 40 hours a week, the reference/adult services librarian works 35 hours a week, and two technical service/assistant librarians work 20 hours a week. The five part-time employees include two in the Children's Room, one in technical services, one handling inter-library loans and one shelving assistant. One of the Town's custodians provides the Library with 20 hours of service per week. The Library makes great use of volunteers from the community. In 2011 volunteers contributed over 400 hours of time to assist with the Library's operation.

Budget: The Library's funding derives principally from municipal appropriations at annual Town Meetings. For the 2012 Fiscal Year, the Library has an operating budget of \$310,257.00. The State Library Incentive Grant (LIG) and the State Municipal Equalization Grant (MEG) monies make up another \$8,500.00 available for operations. The Library holds several small restricted and unrestricted trust funds that when combined total the principal amount of \$23,434. Only the interest is expendable and is controlled by the Board of Trustees. The Library also holds a small gift fund that is deposited with the Town. The Trustees control the expenditures.

Facility: The Library building was built in 1901 with 4,000 square feet of floor space on two levels. In 1976, the basement was renovated to be the Children's Room. In 1995, a 12,000 square foot addition was funded through a combination of Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners Public Library Construction Program funds (\$817,112), a Proposition 2 ½ Override (\$930,000) approved at Town Meeting and local fundraising efforts (over \$350,000). The addition, opened in August, 1997, included a complete renovation of the existing building and a new three-story addition. The addition accommodates a new entrance that complies with the access standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), an elevator, interior stairway and ADA-compliant restrooms. The addition also houses collection areas for adult fiction and non-fiction as well as a large children's room with book shelving, a story/craft room and restrooms. The building is accessible to all, meets ADA code throughout and has upgraded code-compliant electrical, plumbing and HVAC systems.

In 2006, issues with the building prompted a major renovation plan to correct roof leakage, mold growth and structural problems. The June, 2007 Town Meeting approved \$94,800 for repairs and in December, the Advisory Board authorized an additional \$28,500 to replace the furnace. Then in January of 2008 a water pipe burst in the attic and flooded the entire building. Library operations had to be moved to the closed Simplex facility for about a year while the Library building was renovated. This expanded renovation agenda was funded by \$2,105,000 approved at a Special Town Meeting in February. It covered the cost of a replacement heating system, new roof, new windows, and a new brick exterior for the addition. The work began in May and was completed in March of 2009 when library operations were moved back to the Library building. The building has been stable since.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014



Circulation: The Library has an ever-increasing circulation of roughly 72,000 items annually. The Children's collection holds 18,900 items and the Adult/Young Adult Collection contains 32,800 items. The collection is made up of books, volumes of print periodicals and newspapers, audio books, videocassettes, CDs and DVDs.

Technology: The library is a circulating member of the Central-Western Massachusetts Automated Resource Sharing service (C/W MARS), which provides an on-line catalog for all public and most academic libraries in the Central and Western regions of Massachusetts. This shared on-line

catalog allows patrons access to a combined collection of over 9 million items from participating libraries. Patrons can order items from home or through the library staff. Last year the library staff processed over 19,000 inter-library loan requests. There are seven computers available to the public and two others for catalogue use.

It should be noted that the State has determined that the western and north central areas of Massachusetts are underserved by commercial Internet providers and so has created the Massachusetts Broadband Institute which is charged with upgrading access to these communities including Westminister. Libraries have been identified as the largest single-site user in most towns and so network improvements will be focused on them. Forbush has recently been evaluated by Gannett Fleming, Inc., contractor for the MBI, prior to installation of upgraded broadband service, which we anticipate will be installed soon.

Programs: The Library offered over 160 different programs in FY 2012, with 124 programs geared towards school-age children. The library hosts a six-week summer reading program that includes story-times, craft activities, movies and talented children's performers in addition to a full schedule of story-times and craft activities during the school year. For adults, the library hosts a "Great Decisions" seminar for eight weeks each winter, twice-monthly book discussion groups, occasional performers, an annual book and bake sale, and a winter holiday gathering. The Library provides a book delivery service for homebound citizens. The Library receives grants from the Westminister Cultural Council to cover the cost of performers and art classes. The "Friends of the Forbush Memorial Library" group holds fund raising events on a regular basis that underwrite the Library's museum pass program and children's activities.

Special collections: The Library maintains several special print collections in the limited access Hurd Room such as town and county histories, genealogies, military records and materials related to General Nelson A. Miles. During 2011, the Library reorganized and catalogued these items and now they are listed in the on-line catalogue for the first time. Researchers and students can also make application to consult these non-circulating materials during open hours.

The Library also cares for a significant collection of fine art and artifacts related to the early history of Westminister, many of which are on display. These are under the care of the Curatorial Committee appointed by the Board of Trustees. In 2011, the committee oversaw the installation of additional security in the Eloranta Room, the change of Gen. Miles uniform on display, and sent Deacon Robert Peckham's *View of Westminister in 1831* to the Williamstown Art Conservation Center for restoration.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

Upcoming Capital Needs:

The Library building has been stabilized and no major capital facility or maintenance needs are anticipated in the near future. The Board of Trustees is currently preparing a long-range plan (2012 – 2017) that will provide direction for the future use of the 1,200 square feet of unfinished attic space built as part of the 1997 addition. When the future use of this room has been determined, the Library Board of Trustees will submit a capital request for architectural services to estimate the cost for utilizing this space.

Board of Health

Organization: Westminster has a three-member elected Board of Health. Each member is elected to a three-year term. The Board meets twice a month in the Town Hall. The Board of Health appoints the Health Agent.

Staff: The Board has a full-time Health Agent, full-time Administrative Assistant, and part-time Assistant Health Agent (19 hours per week). An Animal Inspector provides services per State regulation on an as-needed basis.

Budget: For the 2012 Fiscal Year, the Board had an operating budget of \$107,417.

Programs: Most of the Board of Health activities, programs and initiatives are dictated by Massachusetts General Laws. The Board's current work program includes the following:

- Health inspections for establishments preparing, selling or giving away food and drink including year around restaurants, seasonal restaurants, bakeries, delis, ice cream stores, bars, school kitchens, catering operations, convenience/retail stores, Mobile Food Units, church kitchens, Bed and Breakfasts, Senior Center, Food Pantries, Concession stands at Oakmont, Monty Tech and Little League Field.
- Working closely with the Farmer's Market: inspecting food booths, holding an annual educational seminar for participants on food safety.
- Issuing Residential Kitchen Permits: inspecting home kitchens for those desiring to sell baked goods and jams and jellies at Farmer's Markets and fairs.
- Issuing Temporary Food Permits for sales of food at special events in the community.
- Permitting and regulating tobacco sales and use in Westminster. New regulations were promulgated to regulate emerging non-tobacco nicotine delivery products.
- Health inspections and issuing permits for Tanning Establishments, Swimming Pools and beaches, Recreational Camps, Motels/Inns,
- Permitting and approving all water wells and geothermal wells.
- Reviewing public water supply reports and private well water test results.
- Permitting on-site septic systems including witnessing percolation/soil evaluation tests, reviewing and approving septic plans, and inspecting throughout the installation.
- Witnessing Title 5 Inspections.
- Investigating communicable diseases of residents and submitting a case report on-line to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.
- Holding annual flu clinics.
- Emergency Preparedness Planning including exercising plans for Emergency Dispensing Sites.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

- Compiling a list of volunteers for flu clinics, Emergency Dispensing Site and emergency shelter. Encouraging community participation in the local Medical Reserve Corp.
- Water quality testing for Crocker Pond Beach.
- Health code inspections for Massachusetts subsidized rental housing.
- Following up on complaints regarding trash, unsafe housing conditions, nuisance odors, nuisance dust, nuisance noise/noisome trades and food code violations.
- Reviewing and signing Building Permit applications.
- Permitting and inspecting hydronic heaters/outdoor wood furnaces.
- Issuing beaver trapping permits.
- Sponsoring the annual rabies clinic for cats and dogs.
- Promoting hazardous waste collection days with Waste Management in conjunction with neighboring towns.
- Cooperating with the Police Department on semi-annual drug take-back days. Working with the police to establish a permanent drug take-back program at the police station.
- Inspecting barns, farm animals and back yard flocks by the Animal Inspector.
- Permitting septic system installers, septage haulers/porta-potty companies and funeral directors.
- Monitoring Landfill Operations: Scale House and Transfer Station, reviewing inspection reports from DEP and monthly tonnage reports.
- Working with the Regional School District on Healthy Living Initiatives including a Nutrition Program.
- Educating the public on risky behaviors, diseases, and being prepared for emergencies.

Upcoming Capital/Funding Needs: While the Board of Health doesn't anticipate any major capital expenditures during the next decade, it is planning for the following programmatic initiatives that would require funding:

- Work with the Department of Public Works on the installation of sidewalks and bike lanes throughout Westminster to encourage a more physically healthy community.
- Create a sharps collection program (collecting and disposing of medical needles) per mandate by the State Department of Public Health. The Board is already providing sharps collection boxes to individuals, and envisions building kiosk for "sharps" (used needles). Waste Management Inc. is providing disposal services through the Westminster Drop-Off Center at the Landfill.
- Establish an automated tracking system for septic systems, including: installations, pump-outs, Title 5 inspections, failures, and Innovative/Alternative Technology required inspections.
- Create a GIS mapping system to locate all septic systems and wells in Westminster. The Board would also like to use GIS mapping for emergency planning, such as locating citizens on oxygen if a power outage occurs. GIS could also be used to track disease clusters to study if there is a possible environmental causal factor.
- Establish an electronic document storage system to back-up, augment, and make readily available extensive history files.
- Launch educational programs with the schools including purchase of curriculum pertaining to children being resilient in dealing with traumatic emergency events.
- Purchase Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) available for dealing with public health catastrophes.
- Undertake a study, in conjunction with the Conservation Commission, to understand the effect of septic systems around the resource areas (wetlands/lakes/ponds) in town and a plan to protect them.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

- Retain outside consultants and engineering support where expertise does not exist at the local level. The MA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) continues to transfer more responsibility to local government for approval and regulation enforcement in areas such as large septic systems with over 2,000 gallons per day flow, nitrogen loading limit review, required groundwater mounding calculations, solid waste and waste site cleanup, wastewater treatment, sewer extensions and landfill permitting.

Council on Aging:

Organization: The Council on Aging (COA) consists of seven board members. Each member is appointed by the Board of Selectmen and serves a three-year term.

Staff: The COA has two full-time employees: the Director, who works 35 hours per week, and a Van Driver, who works 37 hours week. There are also two part-time employees: one driver (Meals on Wheels program), and one assistant who work 7 hours a week. The Council has utilized volunteers from the Property Tax Work-Off Program, for coverage in the office and special task. The COA has 22 clients and the maximum is 25 clients with maximum of 125 hours, at the rate of \$8.00 per hour, with a Program total of 2,750 hours. The volunteers are available to assist other Town departments. For more information on the Town's Property Tax Work-Off Program, please click here: <http://www.westminster-ma.gov/pages/mp/seniortaxwork-offprogram.pdf>

Budget: For fiscal year 2012, the COA has an operating budget of \$31,820. The COA also receives \$8,563.00 in a Formula Grant from the State and these funds are used for Director's supplement (\$1.00 per hour), mileage, supplies, Tai Chi classes, art classes, dues, subscriptions, conferences and mailings. The COA also receives donations from various organizations, and the public.

Facility: The Town is in the process of building a new 7,500 square foot senior center at 69 West Main Street. The facility will contain a large multi-purpose room, several smaller meeting rooms, offices for the COA staff, a kitchen and dining area, and parking in the rear of the building. This facility will be ready to use by the fall of 2014. There is enough room in the rear of the property to accommodate up to 72 new units of senior housing. Prior to this, the center was located in the American Legion building on Main Street.

Programs: The COA offers a variety of outreach, health, transportation, education and recreation programs to Westminster's seniors. These programs include home visits and phone checks for seniors living on their own, transportation services to area doctor visits, a nutrition program, health clinics, an exercise program, AARP tax seminar, assistance with Federal Program forms, and three meals a week at the Senior Center, and also delivers 5 days a week to the home bound through the Meals on Wheels program. The information is available through a monthly newsletter, the local television access channel and also the Westminster Town Web Page.

Upcoming Facility Needs: In 2005, the Town bought 13 acres of land at 69 West Main Street for \$135,000.00, with the intention of building a new Senior Center. Located just west of the Town Center, this site also has enough room to accommodate 72 units of senior housing in the rear of the property. A six-member Senior Center Building Committee was formed in 2005 and charged with moving this project forward. In 2012, the Town formed a five-member Architect Review Committee. The Committee Has chosen an architectural engineering firm to for the building's design/development and \$200,000 was approved for this purpose at the annual Town Meeting in May 2012.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

Agricultural Commission:

Organization: The Commission is comprised of five members and two alternates, all appointed by the Board of Selectmen. They meet every 2nd and 4th Wednesday of the month at the Town Hall. The Commission is all-volunteer and does not have any paid staff.

Budget: The Agricultural Commission does not receive any municipal funding. Its operating budget is funded through fees derived from the Farmer's Market operation. The Board of Selectmen is the entity that approves the Farmer's Market fee schedule.

Programs:

- The Commission monitors the Town's "Right to Farm" bylaw, which guarantees farmer's rights as an acceptable land use throughout Town.
- The Commission's primary duty is managing the very successful Westminster Farmer's Market on Academy Hill, which is open for business every Friday afternoon from May through October from 3pm-6:30pm. 2012 will be the Market's third season of operation. In addition to benefiting local farmers and producers, the market highlights the talents of local singers, dancers, musicians and puppeteers who come and provide entertainment in exchange for tips. During the season many community activities are scheduled at the farmers' market including blacksmithing demonstrations, children's cooking demonstration and a harvest festival.
- The Commission also sponsors a table at the Young Children's Festival in April. This program supplies seeds and gardening information for "bunny gardens" for families to establish in their own yard. Various micro-greens are grown and presented on the day of the festival.
- The Commission has future plans for an educational series based on agricultural/horticultural topics, assistance with a possible school garden at Overlook School and an in-town demonstration planting.

Public School System:

Organization: Westminster is part of the Ashburnham-Westminster Regional School District. There is a ten member School Committee, with each town having five members. Both towns elect the candidates for the entire Committee, as opposed to just having each town vote for its set of candidates. The Committee sets school policies and oversees the School Department's operations. The District offers education from Kindergarten through High School. It should be noted that students in the Montachusett Region that are about to enter high school can choose to attend the Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School, located in Fitchburg.

Budget: For fiscal year 2012, the School Department had an overall operating budget of \$22,997,774. This figure includes \$9,935,704 in State education aid (Chapter 70) and a regional transportation reimbursement of \$629,554 from the State Department of Education.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014



The table below presents Westminster's per pupil expenditure figure compared to its neighbors.

**Table TG-13
Per Pupil Expenditures Year 2012**

Westminster/ Ashburnham Regional	Quabbin Regional (Hubbardston)	Wachusett Regional (Princeton)	<u>Gardner</u>	<u>Leominster</u>	<u>Fitchburg</u>	Monty Tech HS
\$11,619	\$11,542	\$10,170	\$11,072	\$11,458	\$12,448	\$16,978

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education – 2011 is the latest year for available data.

Facilities: The Westminster-Ashburnham Regional School District consists of five schools (see descriptions below and on the following page).

Oakmont Regional High School	
Location:	9 Oakmont Drive, Ashburnham
Built:	1962, most recent addition 2004
Size:	191,438 square feet
Capacity:	1,235
Students:	699
Remaining Capacity	536
Compliant w/ADA:	Yes
Facilities:	Classrooms, library, gym, café, auditorium
Owned By:	District owned

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

Overlook Middle School	
Location:	10 Oakmont Drive, Ashburnham
Built:	1995
Size:	87,000 square feet
Capacity:	830
Students:	586
Remaining Capacity:	244
Complaint w/ADA:	Yes
Facilities:	Classrooms, library, gym, café, auditorium
Owned By:	District owned

John R. Briggs Elementary School	
Location:	96 Williams Road, Ashburnham
Built:	2012
Size:	87,000 square feet
Capacity:	765
Students:	524
Remaining Capacity:	241
Compliant w/ADA:	Yes
Facilities:	Classrooms, library, gym, café
Owned By:	Town owned

Westminster Elementary School	
Location:	9 Academy Hill Road, Westminster
Built:	2000
Size:	85,000 square feet
Capacity:	740
Students:	353
Remaining Capacity:	387
Compliant w/ADA:	Yes
Facilities:	Classrooms, library, gym, café
Owned By:	Town owned

Meetinghouse School	
Location:	8 South Street, Westminster
Built:	1995
Size:	35,955 square feet
Capacity:	375
Students:	246
Remaining Capacity:	129
Compliant w/ADA:	Yes
Facilities:	Classrooms, library, gym, café
Owned By:	Town owned

Source: Superintendent of the Ashburnham-Westminster School District.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

Upcoming Capital Needs: The District does not have any current plans for new buildings or additions to its existing buildings in Westminster.

Other Governmental Entities in Westminster:

Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator, Town Clerk, Town Collector, Board of Assessors, Town Moderator, Town Accountant, Town Treasurer, Historical Commission, Cemetery Commission, Crocker Pond Development Committee, Economic Development Committee, Old Town Hall Reuse Committee, Energy Advisory Board, Capital Planning Committee, Emergency Management Committee, Forest Warden, Tree Warden, Historic District Study Committee, Home Heating Assistance Committee, Affordable Housing Committee, Artifacts Committee, Cultural Council, Liquor Commission, Memorial Committee, Open Space Committee, Parks & Recreation Committee, Insurance Advisory Board, Perambulation Committee, Public Safety Building Needs Committee, Route 140 Improvement Committee, Sick Leave Bank Committee, Solid Waste Committee, Senior Center Building Committee, Veteran's Grave Officer, Veteran's Agent, Board of Registrars, and Public Weigher-Measurer.

TOWN GOVERNMENT ISSUES IN WESTMINSTER

Westminster's municipal government has a number of issues to address over the next decade including: how much it spends on municipal government; how it plans for new facilities, buildings and infrastructure; its overreliance on residential property taxes to cover the cost of municipal services; its overreliance on a dedicated group of volunteers to run town government whose local knowledge will be hard to replace; management issues such as inter-departmental coordination and communication.

- Administrative capacity and ability to effectively manage Town government.
- Communication and coordination between municipal departments.
- The cost of funding town government and its impact on the local property tax rate.
- Lack of a prioritized roadway improvement plan.
- Sewer system's capacity issue has the potential to hinder future economic development.
- The need to find a new solid waste disposal site once the landfill closes.
- Maintaining continuity on local boards/commissions/committees that rely heavily on dedicated volunteers and longtime public officials whose local knowledge will be hard to replace.

MAJOR ISSUES FACING WESTMINSTER: DISCUSSION

- 1. Administrative Capacity:** Increasing legal and regulatory demands exceed the capacity of the Selectmen to manage all departments, even with the assistance of a full-time Town Administrator. With every passing year, the Town and its various departments have more and more administrative work. State and Federal reporting requirements have increased substantially over the past 25 years and show no signs of slowing down. As municipal departments and their budgets continue to grow, the Board of Selectmen often struggle

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

with keeping the train on the track, so to speak. The result has been that many projects get delayed, extended, or forgotten altogether. During the past decade, the Town has moved from having a Town Coordinator to a Town Administrator because of the increase in administrative demands, as was pointed out in a 2009 Financial Management Review of the Town, prepared by the MA Department of Revenue. It is quite likely that the Town may reach a point within the next decade where a Town Manager is needed with increased powers and duties to ensure the smooth functioning of Town government. There are two large departments that do not fall under the Selectmen's management umbrella. The Fire Department is managed by a "strong" Fire Chief under MGL Chapter 48, Section 42, which means that the Chief has absolute authority regarding the Department's administration. Also the the Department of Public Works does not report to the Board, but rather the DPW Commissioners. There are also two elected positions (Town Clerk and Treasurer-Collector) that many Massachusetts communities have chosen to appoint as regular municipal staff. At some point in the future, the Town may want to consider establishing a Town Government Study Committee or Charter Study Committee to take a close look at how Town government is organized to ensure a coordinated management system for the delivery of municipal services. It should be noted that Westminster is one of very few communities in Massachusetts to *not* have a Town Charter.

- 2. Communication and Coordination:** The Town's attempts to improve communication and coordination have improved significantly over the past decade, but there is still room for improvement. Town departments rarely meet to discuss their current projects or coordinate activities, and this has led to a situation where many departments don't know what projects the other departments are working on, thus precluding any meaningful input or assistance from other departments. Many communities of Westminster's size have monthly departmental coordination meetings. Also, many of the Town's boards, commissions, and committees do a poor job of distributing their agendas and meeting minutes, leading to a situation where some boards don't know when other boards are dealing with subject matter of relevance, thus hindering inter-municipal communication and coordination. It is hoped that the Town's new website will help improve communication between municipal departments and citizen committees, but especially between Town officials and citizens.
- 3. Municipal Spending and Tax Rate Implications:** It has been previously documented that Westminster has been spending more to operate its municipal government than its immediate neighbors. While all of the spending has been approved at annual Town Meetings, it has had implications for the local tax rate. The cost to operate the Town's municipal government has grown faster than its neighbors during the past twelve years and this has resulted in the Town's average single family home tax bill growing at a faster rate than those of Westminster's neighbors. With the Town's economic development tax base growing at a slower pace than the residential tax base, Westminster homeowners are covering an ever increasing share of the expense to operate Town government. This trend will likely intensify when one considers that there are substantial infrastructure needs to be addressed in the next decade (aging road system, improvements to the water and sewer systems) and the as yet uncalculated cost of waste disposal once the Landfill is closed (not to mention the loss in tax revenue, which currently averages over a million dollars per year). The only way to arrest this trend is for the Town to carefully monitor its budget on an annual basis and create more opportunities for economic development.
- 4. Lack of a Prioritized Long-Range Roadway Improvement Plan:** The Department of Public Work's Highway Division currently does not have a prioritized list of roadway improvements or any long-range plan for roadway improvements. Rather, the Division tackles roadway repairs on an as-needed basis. The current funding level of \$500,000 is the base minimum that the Department believes is acceptable for maintaining the current road system, but there is a need to increase this amount to stay ahead of the Town's

aging roadway network. As mentioned previously, unless the Highway Division starts using a portion of its annual Chapter 90 funding allotment for road maintenance, the Town would need to spend approximately \$750,000 per year for the next ten years in order to bring its road network up to what is considered “fair” condition. The Division’s Pavement Management System (PMS) should serve as the foundation for a prioritized long-range roadway improvement plan.

5. Sewer System as Impediment to Economic Growth: Without addressing its sewer capacity issue, the Town will not be able to accommodate new businesses and industries wishing to locate in Westminster. The Department of Public Works is currently evaluating two options for addressing the Town’s sewer capacity issue:

1) In-Line Sewer Storage Station: DPW’s primary option for addressing the sewer capacity issue is to construct an in-line sewer storage station in the vicinity of the Whitman River. The design for the station is complete and, once built, it will be able to accommodate peak flows and provide the ability for the Town to add flows from the Phase I, II and V sewer expansion areas outlined in the Town’s Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan. This design would prevent the Town from having to significantly alter the existing Whitman River Pump Station, force main and downstream piping systems. The project replaces an existing 18-inch influent gravity sewer upstream at the existing Whitman River Pump Station with an 850 foot long in-line “storage tank”, which is basically a box culvert with a 4x8 internal dimension. The cost of this option is currently estimated at approximately 2.25 million dollars.

2) Three-Barrel Siphon: A second option would be to eliminate the Whitman River pump station and replace with a three-barrel siphon under the Whitman River, as well as replace and increase the diameter of the existing gravity sewer to Fitchburg. At a cost of approximately five million dollars, this option would enable the Town to initiate all phases of the sewer expansion plan the outlined in the Town’s Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan, and provide system capacity that could accommodate up to 50 years of new development.

6. The Need to Find a New Solid Waste Disposal Site: At present, the landfill operated by Waste Management is slated to close in 2026, although the implementation of new technologies may extend the landfill’s lifespan to beyond this date. Once the landfill closes, it will continue to serve as a transfer station for solid waste. However, where the Town’s solid waste will go to from here and what it will cost has yet to be determined. It is recommended that within five years of receiving a definitive closing date for the landfill, the Town should start investigating its solid waste disposal options, the costs involved, and their impact on Town Finances.

7. Volunteer Committees and Continuity: As with many small communities, Westminster makes great use of citizen volunteers to staff its various boards, commissions, and committees. In fact, there are many citizen volunteers that serve on multiple committees. Many committee members are longtime residents and longtime committee members, possessing a great deal of local knowledge and institutional history. However, as the number of committees continues to expand, the Town will have a harder time finding enough volunteers to staff them. Moreover, as longtime volunteers leave their committees, much of their knowledge and institutional history will be lost. Also, new committee members will need a considerable amount of time to get up to speed with their committee’s activities and duties.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

TOWN GOVERNMENT GOAL:

Westminster desires to have a professionally managed town government that is efficient, fiscally sound, responsive, forward thinking and accessible to all, where decision making is fair and transparent, the quality of life for its citizens is enhanced and the character of the community is respected.

TOWN GOVERNMENT OBJECTIVES:

- The Town must commit itself to following through on the recommendations contained herein and strive to maintain the Master Plan as a living document.
- Utilize an improved and transparent capital planning process in combination with a robust municipal economic development strategy to stabilize the amount of taxes paid by Westminster property owners.
- Increase inter-department communication and coordination by having department heads work collaboratively to ensure the overall excellence of municipal services and their delivery. Such efforts should include, but not be limited to collaborative grant writing, the sharing of vehicles, office space and staff, calendar planning and coordination, and setting capital planning priorities.
- Provide necessary police, fire and public services to ensure proper public safety.
- Provide a quality well-rounded education that promotes enthusiasm for learning and knowledge for all Westminster students.
- All newly appointed board and committee members should receive a Town-sponsored orientation session and take advantage of education and training opportunities that will help the new board/committee members become effective community volunteers.
- Foster an improved relationship with our legislators, neighbors, and regional and state partners to make them aware of Westminster's interests and forge a mutually beneficial relationship.
- Encourage our citizens and municipal officials to work towards finding common ground on the issues we will face in the future and create an environment where all voices are heard and respected.
- Support those community events that bring our citizens together.

TOWN GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Implementing Master Plan Recommendations: Upon completion of the Master Plan, the Town should establish a Master Plan Implementation Committee whose job it is to make sure that the Plan's recommendations get implemented. It may be that Westminster's current Master Plan Committee would be willing to take on this task; however, a master planning process is lengthy and demanding. Many communities have found that the members of their master plan committees are ready to move onto other ventures once the plan is completed. In some cases, other communities want to have a clean separation

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

between those who prepare the plan (the Master Plan Committee) and those who implement the plan (the Implementation Committee). Thus, they specifically prohibit Master Plan Committee members from joining the Implementation Committee, preferring to bring in “new blood” for the plan’s implementation. The Board of Selectmen would appoint the Master Plan Implementation Committee, who in turn would meet with the Town’s other municipal entities that have Master Plan implementation responsibilities and work with them to keep the Plan on track. It is suggested that the Committee periodically brief the Board of Selectmen on the Plan’s progress, perhaps on a quarterly basis or twice a year. Responsible Entities for Implementation: The Town Administrator, Board of Selectmen, and Town Planner in consultation with the Master Plan Committee.

2. Organizational Flow Chart: The Town should prepare an organizational flow chart that depicts all municipal departments, boards, commissions, committees and ad-hoc committees and outline which entity established them and which entity they are supposed to report to. Responsible Municipal Entities: Town Administrator in conjunction with the Board of Selectmen.
3. Establish a Government Study or Town Charter Committee: The Town should organize a Government Study or Town Charter Committee to review and analyze how Westminster’s town government is currently organized and make appropriate recommendations for re-organization that will enable town government to function with maximum effectiveness. Responsible Municipal Entities: Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator, and Personnel Board.
4. Departmental Budgeting Guidelines: The larger municipal departments should prepare a set of guidelines that govern how they put together their annual operating budgets and pay for non-capital expenditures. Having such guidelines would ensure a better degree of consistency when preparing departmental operating budgets from year to year. Towards that end, the departments may find it helpful to review the guidelines of our neighboring communities to identify cost-effective budgeting guidelines. Responsible Municipal Entities: Department of Public Works, Parks and Recreation Department, Police Department, Fire Department and Library.
5. Continue the Current Capital Planning Process: The past few years have seen the Town make great strides in establishing a long-range Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Preparing a CIP is a fairly routine procedure and the various steps are outlined in the report: Developing a Capital Improvements Plan – A Manual for Massachusetts Communities, prepared in 1997 by the Municipal Data Management and Technical Assistance Bureau of the Massachusetts Municipal Association. The CIP is a rolling five-year plan that identifies and prioritizes the Town’s capital needs, and recommends how such needs should be paid for. For several years, the Town had a bare-bones CIP, but not a full-blown CIP consistent with State guidelines. After receiving guidance from a Town with an award-winning CIP process (Northborough), Westminster’ Capital Planning Committee has established a set of budgeting policies and a process for planning for future capital expenditures that are in line with State guidelines. The Committee should continue refining said policies and procedures to ensure a smooth capital planning process where all municipal entities work from the same script and the process is fair and predictable. Further, the Capital Planning Committee should continue to publicize the CIP, particularly in advance of annual Town Meetings, so that voters understand what they are being asked to pay for now and in the future. Responsible Municipal Entities: The Board of Selectmen, Capital Planning Committee and the Advisory Board.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

6. Improve Coordination Between Municipal Departments: The Town Administrator should arrange a meeting of all municipal department heads to be held on a monthly basis. Such meetings will help the various departments coordinate their activities, reduce duplicative efforts, and promote a team-oriented approach to town government. Such meetings will be especially important during the annual budgeting process, and it is suggested that members of the Capital Planning Committee attend those meetings where municipal department operating budgets are discussed. The Board of Selectmen could also promote inter-departmental coordination by reserving some time at each Selectmen's meeting to hear each Board member report on their committee assignments, and even inviting department heads in on a rotating basis to give the Board updates on their department's activities. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator.
7. Training and Materials for New Board/Committee/Commission Members: Each Board, Committee and Commission in Westminster's Town Government should prepare a handbook that details their policies and procedures for new members and then offer a board-sponsored training session to bring new members up to speed. Further, each entity should identify training opportunities for its new members. The Citizen Planner Training Collaborative (CPTC) offers annual training for new and returning Planning Board and Zoning Board members, while the Massachusetts Municipal Association also offers a wide variety of training opportunities for new Selectmen and other municipal officials. The Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions also offers training for new Conservation Commission members. Having a policy/procedure guidebook and offering training opportunities will help the Town achieve some continuity for its various boards/committees/commissions. New members will have a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities if they know the policies and procedures in place and take advantage of relevant training opportunities. Additionally, the Town should provide an orientation session for all newly appointed board and committee members, using the existing Board and Committee handbook as a guide. Responsible Municipal Entities: All citizen-staffed Boards, Committees and Commissions.
8. Upgrade and Expand the Town's Information Technology (IT): There are a number of IT resources the Town could and should pursue during the next decade: there are a variety of software programs that can help schedule permit decision due dates, hearing dates, permit sign-offs, and help with the schedule of meetings. While the Town does have Geographic Information System (GIS) software, this is used by only a few municipal departments (Building, Planning and DPW). There are a number of other departments that would benefit by having a more user-friendly mapping system. The Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) has been marketing a mapping and data service known as "Mr. Mapper" which can be customized to fit the needs of any municipal department, and its applications are limited only by what data exists or could exist digitally. The Town should invite MRPC personnel to attend a municipal department head's meeting to present and discuss the Mr. Mapper service. Further, many municipalities have their tax maps available on-line and the Town should pursue this option as well. Lastly, it is likely the Town will need to hire a full-time IT person sometime during the next decade to cover its ever-expanding IT needs. Currently, the Town contracts with a part-time IT person; however, it is clear that the Town's IT needs are beginning to exceed the consultant's capabilities and available time. The Town might want to consider establishing an IT Committee to survey the various municipal departments regarding their IT needs. Responsible Municipal Entities: Board of Selectmen, Advisory Board, Capital Planning Committee and IT Consultant.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

9. Pursue Grant Opportunities Under the MA Green Communities Program: Westminster joined the State's Green Communities Program in late 2012, thanks to the hard work of the Energy Advisory Board (EAC). As part of this effort, the Town prepared an Energy Reduction Plan and the action items contained in the plan are eligible for grants offered annually by the MA Green Communities Program. The average grant award has been in the range of \$100,000. Responsible Municipal Entities: The Energy Advisory Board working with other Town departments.
10. Investigate Options for Creating a Solar Farm on a Town-Owned Property: The Town should review its town-owned properties to evaluate if any of them are suitable for constructing a solar farm that could generate electricity to meet the Town's municipal energy needs. For guidance on how to initiate such an effort, Westminster should contact the nearby Town of Lancaster which has established the first municipal-owned solar farm in Central Massachusetts. The State's Green Communities program can also help with this endeavor. Once built and operational, the Lancaster facility will be able to generate 610,000 kilowatts of energy every year. Having its own energy source would make the Town less reliant on private utility companies. Responsible Municipal Entities: The Energy Advisory Board, Town Administrator and Board of Selectmen.
11. Review the Town's Inter-Municipal Agreements (IMAs): As noted previously, the Town's sewer IMA is set to expire in 2019, and the Town's solid waste IMA will expire upon the landfill reaching capacity, around 2026. The Town should review these IMAs to look for potential costs reductions and ways to lower its service delivery costs. As with the solid waste disposal IMA, the Town may want to look at other options rather than simply renewing the existing IMAs. The Public Works Commission should begin their review of the expiring IMAs at least three years in advance and should seek professional assistance if necessary. Further, the Commission should endeavor to create an inclusive process where the citizenry is kept apprised of the IMA renegotiation efforts. Responsible Municipal Entities: The Public Works Commission in conjunction with the Board of Selectmen.
12. Prioritized Roadway Improvement Program & Sidewalk Improvement Program: The Department of Public Works should develop a prioritized roadway improvement program based on its most recent Pavement Management Study. A similar plan is needed for the Town Center's network of sidewalks. Further, the Department should annually post on the Town's website a list of the roads and sidewalks it plans to work on during the upcoming calendar year. Annually advertising the Department's road and sidewalk work program would help keep the public informed of DPW activities. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Public Works Commission.
13. Implement the Recommendations of the 2007 Wastewater Management Plan: The Town should pursue every avenue available to fund and implement the recommendations from the 2007 Wastewater Management Plan. As noted previously, the sewer system's lack of capacity is restricting new development (both residential and economic) within the sewer system's service area, which not only includes the Town Center, but the Town's two largest 43D Priority Development sites: Simplex Drive and the Westminster Business Park. Avenues to pursue should include grants such as the State's MassWorks Infrastructure Grant program, and low-interest loans. Above and beyond securing grant funds and loans, the Department of Public Works should try to fund at least one of the Plan's recommendations per year through an annual Town Meeting funding request. The Town needs to choose between the two options currently under consideration, design its preferred option, and then secure the funds to build it (grants, town funds, etc.). Responsible Municipal Entities: The Director of the Public Works Department and the Public Works Commission.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

14. Review All Non-Statutory Fees: The Town should review all non-statutory fees charged for municipal services on an annual basis for programs that serve many users, and a request to review said fees should be included in the Budget Call Letter sent out to every municipal department, board and committee during budget season. A methodology for setting and reviewing fees should be established jointly by the Town Administrator, Board of Selectmen and the Advisory Board in order to assure consistency across municipal departments. Since Westminster is so small, it is unlikely that the Town will ever generate much revenue from fees. Still, wherever costs can be recovered from user fees, the result is reduced pressure on the tax levy. Every town in the Commonwealth struggles with setting fees for municipal services. Local officials do not want to impose unreasonable charges on residents, despite pressure to generate revenue from sources other than the tax levy. Many towns survey the fee schedules of nearby communities and set local fees within range of prevailing practices elsewhere. Unfortunately, this approach masks the possibility that fees in other towns may bear little relationship to the actual cost of service delivery. Local governments need to approach fee setting with more precision than they do, particularly in Massachusetts where municipalities have such limited taxation power. Erring on the side of caution, however, towns often collect less revenue from user fees than they could. Setting fees that capture actual costs can be difficult unless communities have procedures in place to track all of the direct and indirect costs involved with delivering a service. Westminster could consider conducting a study of one service at a time and gradually establish a consistent protocol across town departments. Responsible Municipal Entities: The Town Administrator, Board of Selectmen and the Advisory Board.
15. Investigate Options for Regionalization of Services: Although regional services are common in other parts of the country, Massachusetts has very few successful models of regional cooperation. Here, the most common form of regionalization is a regional school district. Not surprisingly, the average cost of local government services per capita runs fairly high in Massachusetts. Small towns like Westminster should explore regional opportunities wherever possible. For example, several communities could join together and fund a regional Conservation Officer for wetland inspections. Currently, this is a part-time position in Westminster. In addition, animal control, technology and energy purchase agreements are also potential candidates for a regional approach to service delivery. The Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (Westminster's regional planning commission) is in the process of developing a regional services delivery program and the Town should work with them and other entities to investigate shared services as a means to reduce budget expenditures while ensuring the delivery of quality municipal services. One possibility is having the Town establish its own Regional Services Committee to investigate which local services would be better provided on a regional basis. Responsible Municipal Entities: The Town Administrator, Board of Selectmen and the Advisory Board.
16. Develop a Plan for the Reuse of the Old Town Hall: Originally constructed in 1839, the Old Town Hall on Bacon Street has sat vacant since 2007 when the town government operations were moved to the New Town Hall on South Street. The Town needs to develop a plan for the disposition of the Old Town Hall, whether it's using the building for a new municipal purpose, selling the building to a private entity, or taking down the building and clearing the way for a new structure and/or use. The first two choices will entail expending the necessary funds to secure the building from further deterioration. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen.
17. Begin Planning for the Town's Future Solid Waste Disposal Needs: It is recommended that within five years of receiving a definitive closing date for the landfill, the Town should start investigating its solid waste disposal options, the costs involved, and their impact on Town Finances. Responsible Municipal Entities: Board of Selectmen and DPW Commissioners.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

18. Establish a Municipal Building Needs Committee: This committee would evaluate the adequacy of our municipal buildings to meet the future needs of the community and provide recommendations for improvements, taking the following items into consideration: physical condition, space needs, safety, code compliance and energy efficiency. Responsible Municipal Entity: Such a committee would be appointed by the Board of Selectmen and bring in expertise from relevant municipal departments, boards and committees.
19. Maintain Landscaping on Town Center Municipal Properties: Prepare and implement a strategy to maintain the landscaping on municipal properties in the Town Center on an on-going basis. The intent of this effort is to ensure the health, community safety and attractiveness of any street trees and island plantings that currently exist in the Town Center or are planned for the future. This effort would include preparing a master list of plantings and an annual maintenance plan and budget, as well as an investigation of funding sources (budget line item, donations, corporate sponsorships, etc.). Anticipated work would include weeding, mulching, ameliorating salt damage, branch thinning, fertilizing and pruning of all plantings on the master list. Responsible Municipal Entity: Agricultural Commission and community volunteers.

WESTMINSTER MASTER PLAN 2014

