

Westminster Master Plan Update – Project Overview

As many of you are probably aware, the Town of Westminster’s last Master Plan was completed in 2000 and is now out of date. It is no longer used as a guiding document by Town policy makers and, being more than ten years old, no longer earns the Town points towards State grants. Much has changed since the last Master Plan and the Town needs to revise its long-range planning documents to reflect the new realities that face us. What follows below is an overview of the process the Town will use to prepare an update to the Master Plan.

Master Plan – An Overview

The legal authority for creating local Master Plans is derived from Chapter 41, Section 81-D of the Massachusetts General Laws, with the following statement of purpose.

“Such a plan shall be a statement...that is designed to provide a basis for decision making regarding the long-term physical development of the municipality.”

The law places the responsibility of preparing a local Master Plan on the Planning Board; however, in practice most Planning Board delegate the task to a Master Plan Committee comprised of local officials (both elected and appointed) and citizens. In terms of content, the law states that the following elements shall be included in a Community Master Plan:

- Goals and Policies Statement
- Housing
- Transportation
- Economic Development
- Natural Resources
- Open Space and Recreation
- Community Services
- Land Use Plan
- An Implementation Plan

Although not required by the Master Plan statute, some communities have chosen to complete additional chapters for their local Master Plans, addressing such topics as Energy Planning or Sustainability.

Please note that one Master Plan chapter has already been updated: the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) updated the Transportation chapter of the Master Plan in 2010. Also please note that two of the Master Plan chapters (natural features and open space/recreation) can serve double-duty as chapters in the Town’s Open Space & Recreation Plan which will need updating in the next few years.

Purpose of the Master Plan

A local Master Plan typically:

- Sets forth the Town's policies on future land development.
- Sets forth a Vision Statement for the community.
- Plans for the orderly expansion of municipal services.
- Serves as the Town's plan of action for the next decade.
- Serves as the foundation of the zoning scheme.

Benefits of a Master Plan

- Every community benefits by having a plan of action.
- Communities with up-to-date Master Plans typically receive better bond ratings.
- Communities with up-to-date Master Plans receive bonus points on State grant applications.
- Having an up-to-date Master Plan will put the Town in a better position to negotiate with developers on housing projects proposed under the Comprehensive Permit process (40B).

Timeline

The Master Plan Committee will be meeting once a month until the job is done.

Completing a Master Plan update typically requires about 1,000 of labor. The Master Plan Committee started its work in the Fall of 2011 and will continue on until the job is done (late 2013 or early 2014).