

# Introduction

2009



## Part 1: The City of Westminster

Beautiful countryside, clean air, abundant water, healthy climate, quality schools, industrious work force, and easy accessibility to Baltimore: these are some of the reasons that people were attracted to the City of Westminister as a place for conducting business, establishing a residence, and vacationing in 1887. Although the City of Westminister is no longer the resort it was in the late 1800s, people are still drawn to Westminister for many of the same reasons today.

The first lots in Westminister were laid out by William Winchester in 1764. There was no particular reason for locating a town where East Main Street and North Church Street intersect today. There were no major, pre-existing crossroads in the area and no navigable waters, often important factors in the founding and growth of a city. Winchester simply created and sold the lots along the road to Baltimore, a pattern that was repeated on present day Main Street by other landowners.

With no real driving force for growth in Westminister, the population increased slowly. Scotch-Irish and Palatinate Germans and Swiss moved to the area from Pennsylvania, and English and Scotch-Irish came from the Maryland tidewater areas to the south. These residents soon took an active role in the growth of Westminister.

The first major instance of growth in Westminister resulted from the Baltimore and Reisterstown Turnpike, built through Carroll County in 1807 to facilitate trading between Baltimore and Pittsburgh. This turnpike was built through Westminister only after considerable lobbying by Westminister residents.

Westminister quickly developed into a transportation center as a result of the turnpike. Conestoga wagons and mule drivers constantly passed through the town, and a horse drawn bus line provided passenger service between Westminister and nearby towns. Numerous businesses opened along Main Street to serve the travelers and the town's increasing population.

The creation of Carroll County and the designation of Westminister as the county seat also helped to spur growth. This occurrence was once again the result of the lobbying efforts of the residents in Westminister and the surrounding areas. Westminister was originally located near the boundary separating Frederick and Baltimore Counties, and residents were forced to travel long distances to carry out any legal business. As a result, area residents repeatedly petitioned the Maryland General Assembly

## Chapter 1

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to create a new county centered on Westminster. A number of these petitions failed until Carroll County was finally created in 1837. The biggest champion of the creation of this new county was John Longwell, who established the *Carrolltonian*, a newspaper devoted to supporting of the creation of Carroll County.

The designation of Westminster as County Seat resulted in the construction of a number of public and civic buildings. The County Jail was constructed in 1837 and the Court House was completed in 1838. In addition, religious denominations began to construct churches, and in 1846 Ascension Episcopal Church became the first English church built in Westminster. The Order of Odd Fellows took part as well by constructing an Opera House for the entertainment of residents and visitors in Westminster.

Shortly after the creation of Carroll County, Westminster was incorporated as a town by Chapter 418 of the Acts of 1838, under the name of The Burgess and Commissioners of Westminster. That charter was amended by Chapter 335 of the Acts of 1856, which characterized the municipality as a city by changing the name to "The Mayor and Common Council of Westminster." Westminster became the county seat of Carroll County and remained a part of that county, but, as a municipal corporation, it was given certain special, separate, and distinct powers. The City Charter was repealed and reenacted by Chapter 341 of the Acts of 1910.

The citizens of Westminster were conscious of the link between transportation and growth in the town, and as early as 1847, committees began to meet to study the possibility of constructing a rail line through Westminster. Discussions with the Baltimore and Susquehanna Railroad and the strong support of local residents eventually yielded results, and the Western Maryland Railroad was constructed through Westminster in 1861. The expected growth followed, as the railroad increased the ease of passenger travel and transport of goods to Baltimore.

The most recent transportation corridor constructed in the Westminster area was Maryland Route 140, built in 1952 as a bypass for Main Street. As with the previously constructed turnpike and the Western Maryland Railroad, the Maryland Route 140 bypass greatly increased the ease of travel between Westminster and Baltimore and provided the opportunity for significant commercial growth along the Westminster section of Maryland Route 140. This accessibility increased even more with the completion of Interstate Route 795 in 1987 between the Baltimore beltway and Maryland Route 140, north of Reisterstown. As with the construction of Maryland Route 140 in the 1950s, the opening of Interstate 795 allowed residents of Westminster, as well residents to the north, to travel more quickly to employment in the Baltimore area, thus resulting in new pressure for additional residential and retail growth in the Westminster area.

## Part 2: History of the Comprehensive Plan

The first Comprehensive Development Plan for Westminster and Vicinity was written in 1971 as a joint effort by the City of Westminster, Carroll County, and a consulting firm. The preparation of the plan was partially funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The 1971 plan was primarily a land use plan, and the future land use plan was based on existing land uses, existing and proposed roads, water and sewer facilities, and stream conservation. The appendix of the plan included information on the housing situation in Carroll County, as well as goals for achieving adequate housing for all County residents.

The only update of the 1971 plan took place in 1985. The Comprehensive Plan for Westminster and Environs was developed by the City of Westminster and Carroll County, and addressed a considerable amount of land outside of the Westminster corporate limits. This plan also focused on land use issues, but included expanded sections that discussed environmental issues, water and sewer facilities, and public services. It also contained a chapter that provided general guidelines for the implementation of the plan.

The 1998 City of Westminster Comprehensive Plan was developed by City staff with assistance from an Advisory Committee and certain City Boards and Commissions. Relevant chapters were developed with input from Carroll County staff. The 1998 Plan was developed to address land that is located within the corporate limits of Westminster. Subsequently, the City adopted its most recent comprehensive plan on June 14, 2004.

The Carroll County 2007 Westminster and Environs Comprehensive Plan includes the examination of those areas outside of the City boundaries that were previously included in Westminster planning studies.

## Part 3: What is a Comprehensive Plan?

### Section 1: Define Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan is the basic foundation for local planning and is required under Article 66 of the Annotated Code of Maryland. It lays out the community vision and priorities and describes, where, how, and in some cases, when development will occur. The plan is approved by the City's Planning and Zoning Commission and adopted by The Mayor and Common Council. It provides flexible guidelines for policymakers, land managers, and citizens about how to conserve, rehabilitate, or develop an area while addressing land use, transportation, infrastructure, urban design, and the other "building blocks" that make up a city. The plan is forecasted for twenty years and is usually updated every five to six years. A comprehensive plan is needed to ensure orderly growth and protect the public's best interests. It acts as a guide for the future.

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## Section 2: What are the steps of the Comprehensive Planning Process?

The steps of the Westminster Comprehensive Plan process:

1. Identifying the strengths, problems and opportunities
2. Collecting information on the problems and opportunities
3. Developing recommendations
4. Considering possible alternatives
5. Agreeing , through consensus, on a plan
6. Putting the plan to work
7. Monitoring the plan's progress

## Section 3: Westminster's 12 Principles of a Comprehensive Plan

An important goal of the City of Westminster Comprehensive Plan is to be truly comprehensive. This plan expands on the issues of environmental resources, population, land use, transportation, water and sewer, and community facilities. Plan elements also address housing, economic development, tourism, neighborhood revitalization and historic resources, growth management, and interjurisdictional coordination. In addition, specific goals and objectives are provided to guide City officials and staff in decision-making and in prioritizing work activities. The City of Westminster Comprehensive Plan will be reviewed and updated every six years, in accordance with Article 66B of the Annotated Code of Maryland, to assure that the visions for Westminster are achieved and that the changing needs of the community can be met. The 2009 Comprehensive Plan Update promotes the following principles in order to educate the public on the purpose of a Comprehensive Plan:

1. Expresses a community's vision of itself –what the community would like to become- The community's hopes and dreams
2. Establishes an organized public process to identify community values and goals
3. Examines community needs and identifies solutions
4. Creates a framework for decision-making regarding the future of the city and guides the investment of public funds and services
5. Provides a policy framework to ensure consistency with other planning efforts, land use decisions, and capital improvement projects
6. Offers a budgeting tool by targeting the need and timing for investment in public facilities and infrastructure

7. Ensures consistency and compatibility with the plans of nearby cities and the county
8. Indicates what is needed to support planned growth, striking a balance between the land use and its capital improvement needs
9. Offers a tool to coordinate the provision of city programs and services
10. Expands eligibility for grants and other funding sources needed to bring projects to fruition
11. Insures the development of public and private property in appropriate relationships and consistent with the City Plan

Is to be updated periodically to address emerging technologies, change in the population and economy, or other relevant factors

## **Part 4: 2009 Comprehensive Plan**

The 2009 Comprehensive Plan is an update of the vision and goals set forth in the 2004 Comprehensive Plan. The City of Westminster has faced several major changes over the past six years, and as a result the 2009 Comprehensive Plan's vision of growth has changed since the 2004 Comprehensive Plan. After adopting the 2004 Comprehensive Plan, the City encountered a new challenge that reshaped Westminster's outlook on its future. In September 2006, after reviewing the City's final Water Capacity Management Plan, the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) directed the Carroll County Environmental Health Department to no longer approve building permits that would result in a net increase in water demand on the City's water system. The water dilemma has placed a strain on the growth of Westminster. Since 2006, the City has received limited development pressure due the limited water supply available to allocate to new developments. Future growth cannot occur in Westminster without the water in place to supply the new developments.

The 2009 Comprehensive Plan update presented another obstacle to the future growth of Westminster: land. After conducting the Development Capacity Analysis for residential land within the City limits, it was determined that the City has 106 acres of remaining vacant residential land. At the projected rate of growth for the next 20 years, Westminster could be built-out by 2024.

The 2009 Comprehensive Plan includes three new elements, Water Resources, Municipal Growth, and Public Participation & Neighborhood Planning. State law requires the Water Resources Element and the Municipal Growth Element to be adopted by October 1, 2009. The Public Participation & Neighborhood Planning Element is a new element that was created under the direction of the Mayor and Common Council to promote public participation in the local decision-making of Westminster.

## Part 5: Smart Growth

In order to meet the challenges of a City with a limited amount of water and a limited amount of land, the 2009 Comprehensive Plan promotes a vision of Westminster that will adopt the principles of Smart Growth in order to achieve recognition as a sustainable city by 2030.

The following principles of Smart Growth provide guidance for new development, infill development, and redevelopment:

1. Mix Land Uses
2. Take advantage of compact building design
3. Create housing opportunities and choices
4. Create walkable communities
5. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
6. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas
7. Strengthen and direct development toward existing communities
8. Provide a variety of transportation choices
9. Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost-effective
10. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration

## Part 6: Visions

### Section 1: City of Westminster Vision Statement

In order to provide for the overall direction of the *City of Westminster Comprehensive Plan*, the City developed the following Vision Statement in 1998 and reaffirmed it in the 2004 Comprehensive Plan. That vision statement still applies today:

“The residents of Westminster will experience a high quality of life through the adequate provision of public facilities; well maintained and adequate housing, business facilities, infrastructure and public spaces; a high level of safety throughout the community; and a diversity of jobs, housing, population, and services and commodities. This high quality of life will contribute to an enhanced level of community pride and involvement, resulting in a strong sense of place with respect to the City of Westminster and its citizenry.”

This Vision will be accomplished by:

1. Maintaining and improving existing development, in part through historic preservation;
2. Supporting the revitalization of Downtown Westminster;
3. Demonstrating a high quality of design in new development;
4. Providing better pedestrian access, thus making residents less dependent on motor vehicles;
5. Providing adequate recreation opportunities for residents of all ages;
6. Providing an adequate transportation system that also addresses alternative means of travel;
7. Welcoming new residents and visitors, so that these people share an appreciation for Westminster’s heritage;
8. Preserving and restoring natural resources; and
9. Encouraging diversity in population, housing types, employment opportunities, services and commodities, and community organizations, thus providing opportunities for residents to live, work, conduct business, shop, and participate in social activities in their own community.



## Section 2: State of Maryland Planning Visions

The Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Act of 1992 requires the City of Westminster to adopt eight Visions as part of the Comprehensive Plan. These visions, originally prepared in the wake of the 1987 Chesapeake Bay Agreement, address the impacts of rapid population growth and development on our natural resources, call for a culture of environmental stewardship, and promote economic development. Both State and local funding decisions on public construction projects must adhere to the visions.

As part of the Maryland 2009 Smart, Green, and Growing Legislation, the State adopted the following 12 Planning Visions to serve as “*Maryland’s Land Use Policy*.” The Planning Visions bill replaces the State’s 8 existing planning visions with 12 new visions. These new planning visions are the State’s land use policy, and local jurisdictions are required to include the visions in their local comprehensive plan and implement them through zoning ordinances and regulations.

The City of Westminster has incorporated the following 12 Planning Visions into the 2009 Comprehensive Plan Update:

1. **Quality of Life and Sustainability** - A high quality of life is achieved through universal stewardship of the land, water, and air resulting in sustainable communities and protection of the environment.
2. **Public Participation** - Citizens are active partners in the planning and implementation of community initiatives and are sensitive to their responsibilities in achieving community goals.
3. **Growth Areas** - Growth is concentrated in existing population and business centers, growth areas adjacent to those centers, or strategically selected new centers.
4. **Community Design** - Compact, mixed-use, walkable design consistent with existing community character and located near transit options is encouraged to ensure efficient use of land and transportation resources and preservation and enhancement of natural systems, open spaces, recreational areas, and historical, cultural, and archeological resources.
5. **Infrastructure** - Growth areas have the water resources and infrastructure to accommodate population and business expansion in an orderly, efficient, and environmentally sound manner.
6. **Transportation** - A well-maintained, multimodal transportation system facilitates the safe, convenient, affordable, and efficient movement of people, goods and services within and between population and business centers.

7. **Housing** - A range of housing densities, types, and sizes provide residential options for citizens of all ages and incomes.
8. **Economic Development** - Economic development and natural resource based businesses that promotes employment opportunities for all income levels within the capacity of the State's natural resources, public services, and public facilities is encouraged.
9. **Environmental Protection** - Land and water resources, including the Chesapeake and coastal bays, are carefully managed to restore and maintain healthy air and water, natural systems and living resources.
10. **Resource Conservation** - Waterways, open space, natural systems, scenic areas, forests, and agricultural areas are conserved.
11. **Stewardship** - Government, business entities, and residents are responsible for the creation of sustainable communities by collaborating to balance efficient growth with resource protection.
12. **Implementation** - Strategies, policies, programs and funding for growth and development, resource conservation, infrastructure, and transportation are integrated across the local, regional, State, and interstate levels to achieve these visions.

The Smart Growth Areas Act of 1997 designated 'Priority Funding Areas' around the State as a regulatory mechanism designed to support the visions listed above. The Act directs State investment in development such as highways, sewer and water construction, economic development assistance, and State leases or construction of new office facilities to areas most suitable for growth. The City of Westminster is designated as a Priority Funding Area under the Act, and the goals, objectives, and recommended actions contained in the Plan have been drafted within this context.

The chapters that follow address all of the key issues in Westminster today, including environmental resources, population, housing, economic development, tourism, neighborhood revitalization and historic resources, land use, transportation, water and sewer, community facilities, growth management, and interjurisdictional coordination. Each chapter includes a description of the existing conditions in the City of Westminster, identifies the areas of concern, and lists a set of goals, objectives, and recommended actions that are guided by the existing conditions and the local and state Visions listed above.