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# Town of Westminster, Vermont



## TOWN PLAN Version 6.2

Approved by the Planning Commission: October 13, 2015

**Adopted by the Westminster Selectboard: October 14, 2015**

Incorporated November 24, 1735; Township #1

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this plan is to provide direction so as to help assure that decisions made at the local, regional and State levels are in accordance with the goals and policies established by the citizens of the Town. Like all plans, it must be subject to continual improvements, updates and changes to reflect our changing times. A Town Plan is reviewed every 5 years in compliance with State law. A benefit in adopting a Town Plan is being eligible for certain State grants. Therefore, this plan should be regularly reviewed and revised to reflect the opinions of the people of Westminster.

## MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of our Town Plan is to foster active cooperation among our four village centers, enabling us to work together for practical solutions that benefit all. Our aim is to preserve our inherited village character and the rural character of the rest of the Town by employing appropriate land use and Town government decisions to guide growth that will enhance the continuity of work and family life in an active, caring community that holds a long-standing appreciation of our land and historical character. Westminster must look at the future, and plan not just for today but for generations to come.

## CONTRIBUTORS TO THE WESTMINSTER TOWN PLAN UPDATE FOR 2015

The current Town Plan was previously adopted in 2007 and re-adopted on September 2012 to allow the Planning Commission more time for the update process.

### Melinda Bussino:

Thank you to the memory and spirit of Melinda Bussino who was Chairperson of the Westminster Planning Commission in 2010 when the Commission took its first steps toward review of the Town Plan and initiated efforts to obtain renewed community participation in the town planning process. Her dedication to public service provided support and inspiration to new Commission members who needed time and guidance to learn what should be written in an updated Town Plan for Westminster. She participated actively through February of 2012.

### Planning Commission members:

Chair: John Medeiros, Vice-Chair: Chris Vincent, Clerk: John Barnett, Matt Conklin, Kathy Kingston, Randolph Major and Paul Banik (alternate on the PC, an elected member of the Selectboard).

### Previous Zoning Administrator Bill Jewell:

Bill Jewell provided helpful information and guidance to the PC over a period of three years.

### Zoning Administrator and Town Manager Russ Hodgkins:

Town Manager Russ Hodgkins has provided a new level of energy and commitment to helping the Planning Commission members perform their duties. He provided invaluable guidance regarding the content of an effective Town Plan. He has been especially supportive in his habit of providing helpful information while protecting the members' decision-making role within the prescribed duties and limited powers of the Planning Commission.

### Residents' survey responses 2010 - 2011:

The online survey was deemed too complex and was prepared under the mistaken belief that all or most Westminster residents had access to high speed internet. The slow internet speed rendered this survey almost useless. The survey results included responses from 35 residents who indicated an interest in more recreational resources for families.

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### Residents, Spring 2011:

Visitors to a few Planning Commission meetings expressed an interest in the idea of making the minimum lot size one acre for the entire town and expansion of the commercial zone to include more properties in the vicinity of the east side of U S Route 5 near the Rt. 91 Access Road.

### Residents, September 2011:

At a special warned Planning Commission public hearing, the Commission heard statements that the Town needs to reduce the cost of housing for families, possibly by reducing lot size, and possibly by commercial development that might reduce the tax burden on residential land use.

### Residents, October 2011:

The PC heard statements from residents regarding their suggestions for the Town to be included in the update of the Town Plan, including statements from the Agricultural and Natural Resources Committee. Discussion of the state requirement that an economic development element be included in the Town Plan.

### Resident volunteers, January - February 2012:

A Planning Committee orchestrated a special meeting for community participation in the Town planning process, including PC Chair John Medeiros, Town Manager Matthew Daskal, Zoning Administrator Bill Jewell, and Windham Regional Commission Senior Planner John Bennett.

Received written statements from the Land Use Committee, and from the Natural Resources and Scenic Resources Committee, as follows: Christian Blake: proposed land use; Phil Savoy: proposed land use; Randy Major: proposed land use; Beverly Major: scenic resources element.

### Special Meeting for residents, volunteer committees, February 27, 2012:

Each of the following resident volunteers participated in oral discussion as a general committee and in the smaller groups listed below (\*). Zoning Administrator Bill Jewell kept a written record of the comments and suggestions that had been entered on large note pads.

- \*Planning Commission: John Barnett, Melinda Bussino, John Medeiros, Chris Vincent.
- \*Development Review Board: Kathy Mullins, Chris Potter, Phil Savoy, Nate Stoddard, Kyle Skrocki.
- \*Planning Committees: Christian Blake, John Cook, Tammy Kissell, Beverly Major, Randy Major, Kathleen Pirruccello, Sam Streeter.
- \*Conservation Committee: Gary Cobb, Leonard Farrar, Amanda Lovell, Stephen Major, Patricia Mark, Jason Perry, Susan Roman, Doreen Woodward (Town Clerk).
- \* Selectboard: Craig Allen, Peter Barrett, Paul Harlow, Jeffrey Ruggiero, Toby Young.
- \* Listers: Michael Fawcett, Babette Lynde, Ruth Granby, Harland Rounds, Jr.
- \* Road Supervisor: Mark Lund
- \* Fire Chief: Cole Streeter
- \* Recycling Committee: Paul Banik, Eben Gilbenson, Katherine Kingston, Dave Timmonds.
- \* Community Improvement: Woodbridge Fuller, Fletcher Proctor, Fran Renaud.
- \* Council on Aging: Phyllis Anderson, Karen Walters.
- \* Historic Review Board: Barbara Boulton, Nancy Divoll Goutas, Robin Weisel, David Wright.
- \* Windham Solid Waste Management District Representative: Jan Ameen.

### Municipal Planning Grant December 2011 through May 2013:

The Planning Commission received invaluable information and practical guidance from John Bennett (WRC) including the recommendation for reorganization of the Town Plan elements and the written Review Comments provided by the Windham Regional Commission when they reviewed the previous Town Plan in 2007. Planning Commission members held several meetings as a group and individually with John Bennett from January 2013 through December 2014. The rewriting and typing continued from May 2013 through July of 2015. Thank you to all and our apologies for the omission of any name that should have been included here.

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## **PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS IMPLEMENTED SINCE THE PREVIOUS TOWN PLAN OF 2007**

### **Communications:**

Responsive commentaries by the Planning Commission to notices of Act 250 or Public Service Board hearings on applications for communications towers. This work by the Planning Commission constituted implementation of Town Plan recommendations on communications towers balanced with recommendations regarding the economic need for access to high speed communications networks.

### **Public Health:**

Ongoing loans of medical equipment for elderly and disabled residents, or residents who are recovering from major surgery, by Westminster Cares, a non-profit association. This same organization provided for meals-on-wheels and nursing home visits for home-bound elderly. (Westminster Cares is included in the town budget.)

### **Public Health, Welfare, Education and Service Communications:**

Every year, the Town implements Town Plan policies and recommendations by contributing financial support to non-governmental agencies that provide helpful services to the residents of Westminster. For example, the town budget for the fiscal year ending June 2013 included contributions to the following agencies and programs:

Visiting Nurse, Retired Senior Volunteer Program, Vermont Center for Independent Living, Women's Crisis Center, Westminster Cares, Southeastern Vermont Community Action Center (SEVCA), Adult Day Program, Early Education Services, Parks Place, Westminster Gazette, Connecticut River Transit, Windham County Youth Services, Our Place Drop-In Center, Westminster Recreation Area, Humane Society, Mental Health (HCRS). These contributions totaled \$42,895 and similar contributions were budgeted for FY 2014 and 2015.

### **Fire Prevention and Fire District Services:**

#### *Westminster Volunteer Fire & Rescue*

1. Answer fire & rescue calls
2. Respond to motor vehicle accidents
3. Open house for fire prevention week
4. Cover the high school for sporting events
5. Attend end of year gathering at Center School
6. Participate in Spring Fling at Kurn Hattin
7. National Guard Army events
8. Flood and maintain ice skating rink at Center School
9. Provide and cook food for the Community Picnic
10. Hand out candy, serve hot chocolate and coffee during "Trick or Treat" night
11. Provide space and volunteers for Christmas Eve luminaries
12. Do the food concession for the annual "Truck Show" in August
13. Provide Mutual Aid for other departments when needed
14. Check chimneys and stove hook ups for cleanliness and proper installations
15. Provide monthly training for department personnel
16. Aid road crew when needed

### **Law Enforcement:**

Selectboard: Following public meetings and the Town Meeting process, the Selectboard contracted with the Windham County Sheriff's Department for 40 hours per week of policing and law enforcement duties by an assigned Sheriff's Deputy.

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### **Solid Waste and Recycling:**

Selectboard: Following a lengthy process of land transactions and boundary adjustments, the Town secured and landscaped a parcel of property on the Westminster Heights Road to be available for recycling bins.

### **Water Supply and Sewage Disposal:**

Planning Commission members attended informational meetings sponsored by the Windham Regional Commission and Agency of Natural Resources, and then held warned meetings for public discussion on the feasibility of a municipal water and sewer system.

### **Town Government:**

Justices of the Peace: Provision of voting machines to facilitate faster and accurate voting and counting of votes for local, state and federal elections.

The Planning Commission proposed the following Recommendation under the Town Government element: "The Planning Commission will help create temporary Town committees that could each focus on the problem of identifying realistic funding sources for a medium or long-term project, such as bicycle lanes on town roads or protected wildlife corridors."

The Planning Commission proposed the following Recommendation under the Economic Development element: "The Planning Commission will treat each village as having individual planning development goals based upon the conditions and development concerns that apply to that particular village."

### **Westminster Historical Society:**

In 2014, the Westminster Historical Society acquired the Bradley Law Office, located on US Route 5, from the Vermont Historical Society, and plans to preserve this property as it was left in 1858 when it was closed by Attorney Bradley. This lawyer's office is believed to have been undisturbed for 156 years from 1858 through 2014. The Society provides a safe environment to house artifacts pertinent to the history of Westminster, and educates the public through published articles, and limited museum hours on the second floor of the Town Hall. The Society maintains documentation of known historic sites as well as updating information concerning new historic sites or artifacts that come to their attention.

### **Educational Facilities Plan:**

School Board and the Westminster Center Elementary School: Constructed a new gymnasium as an addition to the Elementary School (2008). Also an implementation of public health and recreation policies.

Bellows Falls Union High School District: (2013-2014) Installation of stadium lights to enable evening sports events at the high school athletic fields. This project was also an implementation of public health and recreation recommendations. The Town held several warned meetings to respond to resident concerns and the lights were re-designed to meet the Town Zoning Bylaw and the state standards for regulation of upward and lateral glare. This public discussion and decision-making also constituted implementation of Town Government recommendations and Natural Resources recommendations.

Following the 2013-2014 school year, Bellows Falls Union High School was ranked by *US News and World Reports* and the *American Institutes for Research* (Washington DC) in the top 25% of the Best High Schools in Vermont and top 27% of Best High Schools in the nation. This educational performance recognition included award of a bronze medal.

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### **Child Care:**

Proposed addition of "Child Care" in the Town Plan as a separate planning element. Ongoing inclusion in the Town Bylaw of provisions that enable a child care service to exist in any district zone as either a permitted use or conditional use.

### **Transportation:**

Numerous road repairs and culvert replacements. New culverts installed according to federal and state standards with a natural base on the culvert floor that supports movement of fish and wildlife through the culvert stream both upstream and downstream. Replacement of bridge section on Covered Bridge Road following damage by Tropical Storm Irene (2011). Ongoing reconstruction of dirt roads and small bridges following high intensity thunderstorms, with updated culvert size and design to minimize flood damage and promote flood resiliency.

2010-2013: The Town obtained funding for and completed the construction of a Park and Ride facility on the Westminster Heights Road approximately one-quarter mile from the intersection with the Interstate 91 Access Road.

(2013-2014) Ongoing studies of ancient roads and Class IV trails that must meet state law standards in order for the Town to designate an "ancient road" as a town road appearing on road maps. Acceptance of responsibility for the proper level of maintenance for several ancient roads, some which involve connection with abutting towns.

### **Natural Resources:**

In 2014, the owners of the local Harlow Farm placed substantial tracts of land in trust, surrendering development rights, so that the agricultural soils will not be irreversibly developed for a non-agricultural use. This goal of preserving agricultural lands is a high priority for Westminster residents, based not only on a strong attachment to a rural environment but also on the reality that in many parts of New England a great deal of the best agricultural soils were lost to other uses before local residents had the opportunity, through planning and zoning, to protect this precious resource for future generations.

### **Recreational Resources:**

Ongoing maintenance updates and design improvements at the swimming pond and picnic area on Morse Brook Road, by the Westminster Recreation Department (WRD), a non-profit association. (The WRD is included in the town budget.)

Ongoing Town support for the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association including expansion of the trails and reliable public access. (The Town supports the landowner applications for conservation land trusts which are required to accomplish conservation of the land with the desired level of public access for non-motorized recreation).

### **Energy:**

Construction of solar-power panels for net-metering residential use and solar arrays for commercial uses, which implements town policies and recommendations for reducing dependency on fossil fuels.

### **Housing:**

2010-2012: Westminster Cares paid for a feasibility study and presented for public discussion a proposal that a tract of land on Route 121 in North Westminster be selected as the site for a future elderly housing complex, including a medical services program and space for resident recreation and family visits. The location was deemed unsuitable due to the costs of necessary water and sewer utilities.

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### **Affordable Housing:**

2014: A new affordable housing project – six units was completed on Church Street in North Westminster in a building previously used as a local elementary school and later as a daycare facility operated by Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA). (SEVCA is included in the town budget).

### **Economic Development:**

Since the previous update of the Westminster Town Plan, the Select Board participated in a State Block Grant program that provided a low-interest loan for development of a state and federally licensed slaughterhouse (Westminster Meats) on the Back Westminster Road, near the Interstate 91 Exit 5 Access Road and about one mile from US Route 5. This project helped realize the goal of developing an enterprise that supports local agriculture. The slaughterhouse opened for business and continues at the time of writing this current plan update, and without this slaughterhouse in operation local producers of both standard and organic meats would have to ship their animals a great distance.

2010-2014: The Town and other necessary participants completed land transactions and boundary changes that have enabled construction of the State of Vermont Public Safety Building for Windham County on the Westminster Heights Road.

### **Land Use Plan:**

In order to facilitate practical economic development, the Planning Commission drafted proposed improvements in the Planned Unit Development bylaws. The Planning Commission also proposes in this Town Plan update (2015) that the separate Commercial zone and Industrial zone be combined into a Commercial/Industrial zone. This change was also proposed by the Development Review Board. This proposed zoning change is based on the common need for business owners and investors to change their business activities from a commercial category to an industrial category, or vice versa, with no substantial changes in the hazards that are addressed by the zoning bylaws, including but not limited to: noise, traffic, lighting, parking, air and water quality. Therefore, if this proposed change is approved and adopted, an enterprise that wants to change from essentially commercial to essentially industrial activities, or vice-versa, will not be required to shut down operations and seek a new location. This change was also proposed by residents participating in the planning process.

### **Program for Implementation of the Town Plan:**

Planning Commission: The Planning Commission proposed the following narrative under the Program for Implementation element: “The Planning Commission will examine three or four plan elements each year and submit a written report, preferably in September, indicating the recommendations that are being implemented satisfactorily, those recommendations that need attention or warrant revision in order to be more realistic, and any recommendations that are not being implemented and warrant guidance from the Selectboard as to what action should be taken”.

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## COMMUNITY PROFILE

### HISTORY OF WESTMINSTER

Westminster is the oldest town in colonial Vermont. Jonathan Belcher, Governor of Massachusetts, granted the territory to inhabitants of Taunton, Massachusetts in 1735. Originally known as Township No. 1, and/or New Taunton, it was re-granted under its present name of “Westminster” in 1752 by Governor Benning Wentworth of New Hampshire, who claimed Vermont for his state. Governor George Clinton of New York disputed New Hampshire’s jurisdiction over Vermont, a position that was upheld by the British Crown in 1764. The status of Vermont, whether as a part of New York or New Hampshire or neither, caused continuous trouble until this strife was for a time overshadowed by the outbreak of the Revolution of 1775. It was chartered in 1772 as part of Cumberland County in the colony of New York.

Westminster’s place in the history of the Revolution revolved around an incident that took place at the County Court House. In 1772, the County Court House was located in Westminster and remained there until 1806. In the beginning, it was run by Tory judges who were loyal to King George. This Loyalist domination proved to be too much for area Colonists (or Patriots).

The authority of the royal courts was usurped by an act of the Continental Congress in May of 1774. In November of that year a convention held in Westminster reaffirmed the act of the Continental Congress for the residents of Cumberland County. However, the General Assembly of the colony of New York refused to adopt the resolves of the Continental Congress, opting instead to retain the authority of the royal courts. When they still insisted on holding court, people in this Town rebelled. In March, a court session was to be held to consider action to collect debts, when a history-making event occurred.

Several men tried without success to talk the present sitting judge out of opening court. Realizing that they would have to be inside the building first to be heard, as they would not be allowed admittance once the officials had arrived, a group of about one hundred (100) citizens entered the Court House during the afternoon preceding court day, with a plan to remain until the judge heard their complaints. They went into the building armed only with clubs from a neighbor’s woodpile, already having been assured by the judge that there would be no blood shed by their presence.

While the patriots were in possession of the building, they were attacked by Tories the night of March 13, 1775 resulting in the death of two Patriots, William French of Brattleboro and Daniel Houghton of Dummerston. Both are buried in the old cemetery across the road from where the courthouse once stood, marked by an historic monument. (A model of the old courthouse is presently on display in the Museum in the Westminster Town Hall.)

As a result of this “Westminster Massacre”, about five hundred (500) Patriots quickly assembled in Westminster the next day, equipped for a battle. The judge and other court officials were taken to prison.

After the Revolution, apparently owing to New York’s continuing opposition, the Continental Congress still refused to recognize Vermont as a State separate from New York. As a result, it was here in Westminster, in January 1777, that Vermont settled its own destiny, declaring itself an independent state in the same courthouse that was the scene of the Massacre two (2) years previous, and New York government was overthrown, never to be reestablished. In 1791, Vermont decided to join the Union as the Fourteenth State.

Stephen Rowe Bradley of Westminster served as one of Vermont’s first pair of Senators. He introduced a bill adding two stars and two stripes to the U.S. Flag, representing Vermont and Kentucky. This flag, the so-called “Bradley Flag” flew over Fort McHenry and inspired Francis Scott Key to write the Star Spangled Banner. Bradley opposed slavery, and worked unsuccessfully to keep the United States from declaring war in 1812.

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Stephen R. Bradley's son William Czar Bradley served several terms in the U.S. House. He chaired the commission which established the eastern border between the United States and Canada, spending several years in the wilderness as part of the survey team. When deafness ended his political career, he remained one of Vermont's most respected lawyers, and tutored many law students in his small law office. Bradley's father-in-law, Mark Richards, also served in the U.S. House, where he voted against the Missouri Compromise.

The main street in Westminster Village on U.S. Route 5 was originally laid out during the reign of George the Second, and called the "King's Highway". It is ten (10) rods wide and two (2) miles long, having been designed for use as a training area for a military company.

Westminster succeeded in breaking ground in many ways. The following is a list of only a few of those things that the Town was "first" for in the State of Vermont.

1738/9	First sawmill.
1778	First printing press – run by Spooner and Green. They printed Vermont's first paper currency and were almost immediately charged with counterfeiting the signature on several bills. The guilty parties turned out to be a printer's boy and another Westminster citizen.
1781	First newspaper – the Vermont Gazette (or Green Mountain Postboy). This press is preserved in the Vermont Historical Museum in Montpelier.

Many Westminster natives enjoy places in history:

Westminster's Harriet Holton married John Humphrey Noyes of Putney. With him she pioneered complex marriage (popularly known as Free Love) and helped him found the Oneida Community.

Horace Wells, who lived in Westminster as a child, pioneered the use of nitrous oxide for dental anesthesia. Statues in his honor were erected in Hartford, Ct., and in Paris.

Westminster native Dr. Elisha Harris served on the three-member United States Sanitary Commission during the Civil War. He invented a rail ambulance which bore his name, and eased the suffering of wounded soldiers.

Westminster West native Colonel Josiah Hall led the last cavalry charge of the U.S. Army near Appomattox; the charge was aborted by the news that Lee had surrendered.

Henry Willard, descended from a family that had been in Westminster since 1760, ran the Willard Hotel in Washington D.C. Lincoln stayed there before his inauguration, and it was the most important hotel in Washington throughout the Civil War period.

In 1765, the first school in the Town was established and was taught by Joshua Webb. The Town's first church came two (2) years after.

In 1785, the West Parish (presently known as Westminster West) was set off by a town vote to consequently establish the East Parish (or Westminster Center), and this was legalized by the State legislature in 1797. A church was then organized in the West in 1799. In 1803, the West Parish unsuccessfully petitioned the State to become separate from Westminster, to be renamed "Town of Westbury". The Boyden Grange #157, and Maple Grove Grange #156, were founded in 1874.

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Bill Blake, a pioneering paper manufacturer, established a paper mill in The Forest in North Westminster in 1824.

During the 1830s Westminster farmers were caught up in the silk craze, planting thousands of mulberry trees and raising silk worms. The industry was short-lived, due to weather conditions unsuitable to growing mulberry trees.

The Gage Basket Factory, first established in 1842 on the Morse Brook, was later moved to present Gageville where it made many different kinds of farm and household baskets using local wood. Gage baskets were sold nationwide and were known for high quality. The Gageville factory stayed in production until it burned in the 1940s. By that time it was owned by Cassius Wilson, a member of the family that owned Basketville in Putney. Gageville, a village in North Westminster, grew up around the factory, many of the houses being built for factory workers. The community of North Westminster grew up along the former trolley line between the Villages of Bellows Falls and Saxton's River around 1900. The two communities have since become one, and in 1925 North Westminster was incorporated for the purpose of lighting the streets.

Westminster was an early regional leader in agriculture. In the past, it has been noted for its sheep, cattle (beef, milk, and milk products) horses, apples, tobacco and maple syrup. Prize Merino sheep were imported here from France in 1857 by George Campbell and Westminster became the wool center for the region. Later, a Campbell ewe was sold for \$1,500 and exported from Westminster to Australia for stock breeding purposes. The wool industry eventually disappeared here in the late 1800's, but may be making a comeback as some farmers are returning to sheep farming.

The Westminster West Library was originally established in the West parish in 1870. Generous private gifts had been given to the East Parish by Isaac Butterfield and George Dascomb, among others, for the construction of the building that houses the Butterfield Library and Westminster Institute, which was dedicated in 1926.

The Vermont Valley Creamery, established on School Street in 1887, made high-quality butter and offered an outlet to member farmers from Alstead to Westmoreland, Rockingham to Putney, before going out of business in 1913.

The Kurn Hattin Children's Homes were started in 1893 by the Reverend Charles Dickinson, a native of Westminster, as a place for wayward or orphaned children. Today New England Kurn Hattin Homes continues to be a major presence in our town.

Rural-free delivery of mail began in Westminster on July 1, 1903 with George Walker as Postmaster, originating out of the Walker Store located on Main Street. The rural route was delivered by horseback until 1922, after which the animals were replaced by a car, except during mud season when only horses could get the mail through. The service was discontinued in 1933 after thirty years of service. During this time there was only one day when the mail did not go through, and that was during the blizzard of March 1919. There are currently two post offices in Westminster, one in Westminster Village and one in Westminster Station.

Early in the history of Westminster, the Connecticut River provided an important means of access to the town. Commercial river traffic eventually died out in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with the exception of the big annual spring logging drives which continued until approximately 1919. The Vermont Valley Railroad came through the town in 1851 and provided connections to Rutland, Boston and elsewhere. This made Westminster Station a very busy passenger and freight depot for several years. Passenger service was finally discontinued in 1966. Today, several freights still stop per week.

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Gageville, known later as North Westminster, originated in 1863 around a one-time basket factory established by William Penn Gage on the Saxton's River, site of the first water turbine in Vermont to be used for manufacturing.

The Town has in the past supported a variety of industries, a number of which were dependent upon the waterpower of the Saxtons River. Many of these were located close by the Twin Falls, a rocky gorge located in Gageville. At one time or another, there has been a paper mill, a large tannery, a number of sawmills, a large wooden mill, a box factory, and a power plant in this area.

By the late 1800's more than three-fourths (3/4) of Westminster was cleared for agriculture. Today Westminster is now more than three-fourths (3/4) wooded.

Westminster Station hosted factories and businesses around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the Abenaki Machine Works, which made gasoline engines, the Baxter Bros. Cannery, which canned sweet corn grown by local farmers, a chair factory, and a grist mill on the site of the present Community Feeds. Abenaki went out of business in the 1920s and the buildings were used for a wreath-making business, which left Westminster after being flooded twice, during the floods of 1927 and 1936. Westminster Flats and Westminster Station suffered the most damage locally during the floods of 1927 and 1936, with fields, homes and barns damaged, and many head of livestock drowned. The cannery burned to the ground in 1931 and was never rebuilt. A truck express firm in North Westminster by the name of "Gay's Express" was established in 1928, contributing significantly to the growth of the local trucking industry. Today, the economy is a blend of trucking, agriculture, light manufacturing, public and private studio arts and crafts and service industries.

In the early 1960's the Town changed significantly when Interstate 91 was constructed along its north-south route. The highway splits the town geographically; access is provided by an entrance/exit in the northeast section of town.

David Major of Westminster West founded Vermont Shepherd in 1999, the first sheep dairy in Vermont; Vermont Shepherd cheeses have won national prizes in cheese competitions, and are recognized as a premier product. The Majors have been instrumental in helping many other artisanal cheese-makers in Vermont and New Hampshire get started.

Tony Elliott, Jay Eshelman and Eric Leo of Westminster West founded SoVerNet in 1999, the second Internet access company in Vermont.

Governor Peter Shumlin grew up in Westminster West, where his family has long run Putney Student Travel. He is the first Vermont governor to be a native of Westminster.

Additional information on the history of Westminster can be obtained from Town Hall, the Westminster Historical Society, and the Butterfield Library. Reference should also be made to the 2012 work by Jessie Haas: *Westminster, Vermont 1735-2000*. Ms. Haas contributed to the update of the Town Plan by suggesting new information added to this section on the history of Westminster.

## **GEOGRAPHY AND SOILS**

The total land area of Westminster is 45.84 square miles (approximately 29,000 acres), roughly in the shape of a rectangle about 7 miles from north to south and averaging about 6.5 miles from east to west. It is one of 22 towns in Windham County and is bounded on the north by Rockingham, on the east by Walpole, New Hampshire (the west shore of the Connecticut River), on the south by Putney and on the west by Brookline and Athens.

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The soils over much of the town originate from glacial till derived from granite, gneiss, schist and shale. They are mostly very stony loams low in silt and clay, often acidic and usually well drained but sometimes shallow. These soils in the major stream valleys are of alluvial or outwash origin and are commonly quite deep. There are also a few pockets of organic soils of bog origin.

The soils of the Connecticut and Saxtons River valleys are deep, medium textured, nearly level alluvial or outwash soils. They are generally free of stones and in places are poorly drained. These areas are well suited to dairy farm and cropland uses. Some locations provide good sources of sand and gravel. Excess wetness may interfere with sewage disposal systems.

Much of the northeastern quarter of the Town and the valley south of Westminster West Village is covered with deep moderately sloping medium textured soils with numerous surface stones except where cleared. The soils are sometimes acidic and occasionally influenced by limestone. These areas are well suited to pasture cropland, apple orchard, or woodland uses. A compact subsurface layer may be present which interferes with sewage effluent.

Much of the western half and southeastern quarter of the Town is covered by shallow, stony soils with numerous rock outcrops and many steep slopes. These are medium textured, sometimes acid, soils with numerous surface stones except where cleared. These areas are well suited to woodland or pasture uses. The often-limited distance to bedrock can be a serious problem where excavating is necessary and where septic systems must be installed.

There are a half dozen relatively small areas in the central and southerly portions of the East Parish with deep poorly drained and sometimes stony and organic soils that are fairly level. During much of the year the water table can be near or even above the surface. These areas are moderately well suited to woodland or pasture uses. They are usually ditched or otherwise drained for farming. Excess wetness is a serious problem in road building and where sewage systems must be installed.

During much of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century the Connecticut River was a dumpsite for many factories and mills. As a result much of the fish and wildlife population was eliminated during this time. Fortunately, this condition was reversed in the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century as the result of the work of many private and public groups. Today the river hosts a vibrant ecosystem, although some work remains to be done.

## **CLIMATE**

Westminster has an average precipitation of about forty-four (44) inches per year. There are roughly one hundred twenty (120) days per year of measurable precipitation. The Town receives an average of eighty (80) inches of snow per winter. There are roughly twenty (20) days per year in which one inch or more of snow falls and there are an average of one hundred (100) days per year when the ground is covered with at least one inch of snow. Most winters have several snowstorms dropping five (5) inches or more of snow and at least one (1) freezing rain can be expected each winter.

	Mean Daily Temperature in degrees F	
	Maximum	Minimum
July	80.2	58.7
January	29.2	10.8

The mean duration of the Town's freeze-free period is approximately one hundred twenty (120) days. Westminster lies in the region of the prevailing westerly's, northwest winds in the winter and southwest winds in the summer. Several major events, including northeasters and tropical storms can be expected each year, summer or winter.

## POPULATION

The 2010 Census shows Westminster's population decreased for the first time since the 1950 Census, albeit the decrease from 2000 was small, only one percent. This reverses a trend of population increases that began with the 1960 Census and peaked with a 32.64% increase by the 1980 Census.

Year	Population	Numerical Increase <u>Difference</u>	Percent Increase <u>Difference</u>	Population per Square Mile
1900	1295	-	-	28.1
1910	1327	32	2.47%	28.8
1920	1289	-38	-2.86%	27.97
1930	1324	35	2.72%	28.73
1940	1403	79	5.97%	30.45
1950	1400	-3	-0.21%	30.38
1960	1602	202	14.43%	34.76
1970	1875	273	17.04%	40.69
1980	2493	612	32.64%	54.1
1990	3026	539	21.67%	65.67
2000	3210	184	6.08%	69.66
2010	3,178	-32	-1.00%	69.33

Continuing a trend observed in the 2000 Census data, the figures for 2010 show a further increase in the percentage of the population over 45 years of age. In the past ten years that percentage increased from 37.38% to 50.8%. This is a demographic trend that may continue to affect our future planning.

	2000 Census		Difference		2010 Census	
<b>Total Population</b>	3210		-32	-1.00%	3178	
Under 5 Years	182	5.67%	-34	-1.05%	148	4.7%
5- 9 Years	228	7.10%	-54	-1.68%	174	5.4%
10-14 Years	300	9.35%	-51	-1.58%	249	7.8%
15-19 Years	236	7.35%	-44	-1.37%	192	6.0%
20-44 Years	1064	33.15%	-278	-8.66%	786	24.7%
45-64 Years	870	27.10%	+316	+9.84%	1186	37.0%
65-84 Years	291	9.07%	+107	+3.33%	398	12.5%
85 Years and Over	39	1.21%	+4	+0.1%	43	1.3%

## ECONOMY

Westminster sits balanced between the commercial centers of Brattleboro, Springfield, Keene and Claremont. This is reflected in the Town's workforce statistics. We do not have precise, reliable data on what percentage of our employed adults work out of town, but we know that it is a significant percentage. According to economic development specialists, the fact that Westminster residents are employed out of town is not harmful to the local economy. Bringing income from out of town into Westminster is beneficial. However, if Westminster residents spend a high percentage of their incomes out of town, that habit is harmful to the local economy.

Any money spent locally, going to a local resident or local business, feeds the local economy. Westminster incomes spent out of town do not benefit the local economy.

Of the businesses in Town, agriculture dominates the landscape. While agriculture provides employment to only 6% of the workforce it does provide for significant seasonal employment in the area.

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The absence of municipal water and sewer services makes it difficult to attract business development that would increase local employment opportunities and commerce. The Town should pursue cooperative planning with adjacent towns and regional planners to determine the best means of infrastructure development. Other important industries, according to the economic resources inventory (Appendix) are consumer products and services, and building and construction.

Federal Census statistics for Windham Regional Employment types, 2001 to 2011, show increases in Health Care and Social Services (21%) [2,354 – 2,849], Real Estate and Rentals (17.3%) [255 - 299], Construction (11.4%) [969 - 1079], and in Federal and State Government (28.7%) [369-475]. Decreases occurred in Non-Durable Goods (33.4%) [1,027 - 684], Information (32.9) [398 - 267], Manufacturing (24.9%) [2,833 – 2,127], Natural Resources and (20.8%) [351 - 278], and Durable Goods (20.1%) [1,806 - 1,443].

Future economic development in Westminister is hindered by the lack of infrastructure. The Town has no water system or wastewater disposal system. However, Westminister is well situated to take advantage of its transportation infrastructure. The Town is host to an interstate highway exit and the only bridge across the Connecticut River between Brattleboro and downtown Bellows Falls.

## **STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES, POLICIES AND PROGRAMS**

### **WESTMINSTER TOWN PLAN GOALS**

*The goals of the Westminister Town Plan are:*

1. To plan development so as to maintain the historic pattern of compact village centers separated by rural countryside, working toward an ongoing and respectful relationship among the four villages in our Town while at the same time honoring the uniqueness of each.
2. To encourage diverse enterprises that provide satisfying and rewarding job opportunities and maintain high environmental standards.
3. To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to allow the full realization of the abilities of all residents.
4. To provide for safe, convenient, economic and efficient transportation and communication systems that respects the integrity of the natural environment and that includes paths for pedestrians and bicyclists.
5. To recognize the critical importance of preserving our natural resources and to implement specific measures to guarantee for future generations: clean surface and ground waters, monitored fragile areas, sensitivity to scenic corridors and perpetual protection of our extensive wildlife, our forest and plant life, our soils, topography, and mineral deposits. To identify, protect and preserve educational, scientific, historic and cultural features that can include structures, sites, or districts and archeologically sensitive areas.
6. To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife and land resources.
7. To encourage the efficient use of energy, the development of renewable energy resources, and the recycling, reduction and reuse of waste.
8. To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

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9. To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries by developing strategies to protect the long-term viability of those lands.
  10. To provide for the wise and efficient use of natural resources and to facilitate the appropriate extraction of earth resources and the proper restoration and preservation of the aesthetic qualities of the area.
  11. To plan for meeting the basic social services needs and the availability of safe and affordable housing for Westminster citizens.
  12. To plan for, finance and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs so as to assure and maintain a healthful environment for our people; and to address any changing social needs of the community with clearly defined information available to all and resultant decisions for changes in our Town Plan and/or ordinances, keeping the individual's needs in mind but favorable to the citizenry as a whole.
  13. To encourage the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate child care issues into the planning process, including child care financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care work force development.
  14. To encourage flood resilient communities.
    - A.) New development in identified flood hazard, fluvial erosion, and river corridor protection areas should be avoided. If new development is to be built in such areas, it should not exacerbate flooding and fluvial erosion.
    - B.) The protection and restoration of floodplains and upland forested areas that attenuate and moderate flooding and fluvial erosion should be encouraged.
    - C.) Flood emergency preparedness and response planning should be encouraged.
    - D.) All plans and regulations prepared under the authority of this chapter shall be based upon surveys of existing conditions and probable future trends, and shall be made in the light of present and future growth and requirements, and with reasonable consideration, for the landowner, to topography, to needs and trends of the municipality, the region and the State, to the character of each area and to its peculiar suitability for particular uses in relationship to surrounding areas, and with a view to conserving the value of buildings.

## **UTILITY AND FACILITY PLAN**

### **COMMUNICATION**

Townspople in the different sections receive mail at five different post offices:

1. The Village of Westminster, the southeastern and central portions of the town receive mail through the Westminster Post Office (zip code 05158).
2. Residents north of the village receive mail at the Westminster Station Post Office (zip code 05159).
3. Residents in North Westminster receive mail through the Bellows Falls Post Office (zip code 05101).
4. Some residents in the north end of the West Parish receive mail through the Saxton's River Post Office (zip code 05154).

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5. The balance of residents receive their mail through the Putney Post Office (zip code 05346)

Three companies, Fairpoint, Comcast and VTEL, provide telephone service to the town. There are at least four different exchanges within the town (722, 463, 387, and 869). Sovernet also provides phone service to the Northern section of town. Long distance rates apply only to areas outside of these exchanges and also outside of the recently expanded local calling, which includes Springfield, Chester, southern Vermont towns, and a large number of exchanges in New Hampshire, depending on the home exchange.

Cell phone coverage is spotty to non-existent in some areas of town. Local call access to the global Internet is available in all four of the Town's telephone exchanges. The lack of high speed internet access remains a problem for a large part of the Town.

Television reception varies in quality throughout the town. Some portions of the town are served by cable, while others are not. The use of satellite dishes to improve reception is widespread in many parts of Town. Radio reception is good, with a wide range of stations available to the listener.

Emergency ambulance and fire service through 911 dialing is available throughout the town. A recommendation to change the emergency call number to (603) 352-1100 has been implemented, based on some misdirection of 911 calls.

Communications Policy:

1. To provide an adequate communication system that uses facilities that take into account their visual impact and character of the Town.

Communications Recommendations:

1. The Town shall adopt policies that require the consideration of aesthetics and safety in the siting of satellite dishes, antennae, telecommunications towers, and other transmission and receiving devices to minimize impact on natural and scenic resources. (Selectboard, Planning Commission and Development Review Board)
2. The Town will endeavor to update the Zoning Bylaws to account for changes in technology. (Selectboard, Planning Commission and Zoning Administrator)

**PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY SERVICES**

We have a number of health services provided by organizations in town and surrounding communities. Hospital services are provided by Brattleboro Memorial Hospital and Springfield Memorial Hospital. Organizations include: Westminster Cares, Sojourn's Community Clinic, Women's Crisis Center, Mental Health Services of Southeastern Vermont, Southern Vermont Home Health Care, Visiting Nurse Alliance, Vermont Department of Health Service Office, Senior Solutions (formerly known as Council on Aging of Southeastern Vermont), Youth Services, and the Food Shelf. Ambulance services are available through a contract between the Town and Golden Cross from Claremont, New Hampshire.

Health and Emergency Service Policies:

1. To support regional health facilities, services, and organizations.
2. To ensure that development shall occur in a manner that insures the safety of all citizens and visitors.

Health and Emergency Service Recommendations:

1. To maximize, within the extent of the law, the extent to which all roads are constructed and maintained in such a manner so that all emergency services can be performed. (Selectboard, Road Commissioner, Road Foreman and Windham County Sheriff)
2. The Fire Chief has recommended that if a resident uses a cell phone to call in an emergency, they should use 603-352-1100, which will connect the caller directly to Keene Mutual Aid dispatch. (Westminster Volunteer Fire Department)

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## **FIRE PREVENTION**

Westminster is a member of the following Mutual Aid Systems: Connecticut River Valley Fire Mutual Aid Association (Springfield, Vermont) and Southwestern New Hampshire District Mutual Aid (Keene, New Hampshire). All fire and rescue shall use a 911 number for emergencies. We have two (2) fire stations, the Westminster Fire Station (Westminster Center) and the Westminster West Substation (Westminster West). Both departments meet ISO standards.

### Fire Prevention Policy:

1. To support the fire departments and rescue services which directly serve Westminster residents and businesses.

### Fire Prevention Recommendations:

1. The Town will adopt policies to ensure that all development is designed in a manner consistent with the best fire safety practices. (Zoning Administrator, Planning Commission and Development Review Board)

2. The Town will explore the need to assure that volunteers are not called out for inappropriate needs or concerns other than a fire in process or fire danger, protection of property and rescue of persons at risk of death or irreparable harm. (Selectboard, Town Manager and Westminster Volunteer Fire Department)

3. The Town will support actions that ensure that firefighting infrastructures (substations, equipment, dry hydrants, and main fire station) be maintained and improved as necessary. (Prudential Committee and Westminster Volunteer Fire Department)

4. The Town will support reasonable and timely reimbursement of the Fire Department for services to victims of accidents on Interstate 91. (Prudential Committee)

5. The Town will support the installation of a caution light at the intersection of US Rt. 5 and Grout Avenue, and the intersection of Westminster West Road and Wright Way, to be activated when fire vehicles are responding to an emergency. (Selectboard, Road Commissioner and Prudential Committee)

## **LAW ENFORCEMENT**

The Town has two constables that provide animal control services. Other law enforcement is provided by the Vermont State Police and by contract with the Windham County Sheriff's Department. At the Town Meeting of 2013, the residents voted to fund a new contract with the Windham Sheriff's Department to provide an individual officer to provide law enforcement services for 40 hours per week, for fiscal year 2014.

### Law Enforcement Policy:

1. To support law enforcement agencies that will promote, as much as possible, peace and tranquility within the borders of Westminster.

2. Law enforcement services will be adequate in order to deter criminal activities and respond effectively to crime with the consequences prescribed by our laws and systems of justice.

### Law Enforcement Recommendations:

1. Traffic violations such as speeding, driving without a license, and uninspected vehicles shall be prosecuted as a significant element of public safety and law enforcement. (Selectboard, Road Commissioner and Windham County Sheriff)

2. Law enforcement services may be increased from time to time as evidence of criminal activity warrants. (Selectboard and Windham County Sheriff)

3. The Town encouraged the location of a State Police Barracks in Westminster. Construction started in July of 2015. (Selectboard, Planning Commission and Development Review Board)

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## **SOLID WASTE AND RECYCLING**

Westminster is a member town of the Windham Solid Waste Management District.

At present, Westminster's solid waste and recyclables are collected by Ruggiero Trash Removal. This service is paid for by town taxes.

The towns of Westminster and Rockingham joined together to construct a recycling center in 1993. It is located at the old Bellows Falls Village dumpsite on US Route 5. This center serves as a transfer station for Rockingham and Westminster residents. The Town encourages its residents to recycle at this facility (9 am – 1 pm, Wednesday and Saturday) or at the Town Garage (8 am - 4 pm, Monday - Friday) & (9 am – 5 pm, Saturday & Sunday) or in Putney. As of this printing the recycling site on Westminster Heights Road is not yet open.

The Universal Recycling Law (Act 148) will be instituting a ban on certain solid waste entering the waste stream. Recyclables will be banned from the waste stream on July 1, 2015. Leaf and yard residuals and clean wood waste will be banned as of 2016 with food waste being banded in 2017. Westminster will be developing an alternative to the current curbside system in order to meet the State standards.

### Solid Waste and Recycling Policies:

1. To support the responsible disposal of solid waste.
2. To support recycling.

### Solid Waste and Recycling Recommendations:

1. The Town Manager, in cooperation with the Selectboard, and with the aid of the Windham Solid Waste District representatives, will continue to update the current system for solid waste disposal and recycling so that the Town meets the requirements of Act 148. (Selectboard and Town Manager)
2. The Town shall ensure that solid wastes are not produced or disposed of anywhere in town unless in conformance with all applicable local, state and federal laws. (Selectboard, Town Manager, Development Review Board and Windham County Sheriff)
3. The Town shall ensure that commercial and industrial operations that produce unique or large amounts of solid waste are required to demonstrate that the methods of disposal will not adversely affect the environment. Enterprises generating such waste shall be responsible for proper disposal and associated costs. (Selectboard, Town Manager, Development Review Board and Health Officer)
4. The Planning Commission or a special development committee will conduct a study to identify effective and affordable recycling technology for residential households and for agricultural, commercial and industrial enterprises in Westminster. (Planning Commission)

## **WATER SUPPLY**

The Town does not have a municipal water supply system. Residential and commercial buildings receive water supply from various sources:

1. Most buildings depend upon private springs or drilled wells.
2. Bellows Falls municipal system supplies part of the Village of North Westminster, Kissell Hill, and a section of the industrial area on the Route 5 corridor.
3. Privately owned community systems (of which there are five) supply part of North Westminster and the Village of Westminster as follows:
  - a. Westminster Aqueduct Society, well #5306 – natural spring and ground water
  - b. North Westminster Water Company, well #6308 - both surface and well water
  - c. Shady Pines Mobile Homes, well #5309 - well water
  - d. Birch View Heights, well #5451 - well water
  - e. New England Kurn Hattin Homes, well #5452 - well water

Water resources, while adequate in certain parts of town, are not easily available in other parts.

Some industrial and commercial zones, including the area around Exit 5 off Interstate 91 where the Town Garage is located, lack easy access to a reliable water source. Bellows Falls is the largest and nearest accessible supply.

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Clearly, groundwater provides the primary supply of potable water for Westminster's citizens. The greatest threats to groundwater resources are created by human activity, such as use of pesticides, fertilizers, road salting, animal husbandry and waste disposal. The duration, type and intensity of the activities determine the degree of risk that is posed to both the groundwater quality and quantity. Prevention of contamination, rather than the difficult and costly remediation after contamination has occurred, is a practical and effective means of protecting the community's drinking water supplies.

Water Supply Policies:

1. To maximize water conservation practices when planning for development.
2. To prohibit activities and land uses which may degrade the watersheds of public and private water supply systems.
3. To support the investigation of additional water supplies within the town.
4. To further study and protect the Connecticut River, Saxtons River and East Putney Brook aquifer systems.

Water Supply Recommendations:

1. The Town Health Officer shall encourage people to upgrade water using equipment so as to promote conservation. (Health Officer)
2. The Town shall seek funding and technical assistance to better define aquifer resources and protection mechanisms, such as, maximum impervious surfaces permitted in recharged areas. (Planning Commission)
3. The Town will ask the State to help protect and monitor wellhead areas and prime agricultural lands along US Route 5, US Route 123 and Interstate 91 by minimizing the application of road salt. (Selectboard and Planning Commission)
4. The Town will explore the feasibility of municipal water and sewer services. (Planning Commission)

**SEWAGE DISPOSAL**

With the exception of North Westminster, Terrace Village and parts of Westminster Station, which are partially connected to the Bellows Falls wastewater treatment system, sewage disposal in Westminster is accomplished on an individual basis, utilizing on-site sewage disposal systems. Most dwellings have concrete septic tanks plus leaching fields or drywells. There are some individual systems utilizing steel tanks, which as they corrode, are a major contributor to environmental contamination.

Problems exist in the Village of Westminster and Westminster West due to relatively high densities, growth of the Villages and services normally provided by a village are severely limited because of the difficulty of developing good water supplies and properly disposing of waste water.

Sewage Disposal Policies:

1. To encourage environmentally sound and affordable waste water treatment.
2. Sewage disposal systems shall be designed and constructed in consultation with a qualified state licensed professional engineer or technician in accordance with applicable State and local regulations.

Sewage Disposal Recommendations:

1. The Town will implement policies to manage water consumption in order to lengthen the life and efficiency of wastewater treatment facilities. (Planning Commission)
2. The Town will encourage the use of alternative on-site disposal systems such as composting toilets and grey water recycling where feasible and appropriate. (Zoning Administrator, Planning Commission and Development Review Board)
3. The Town will support installation of community wastewater treatment facilities wherever feasible and cost effective, such as villages, clustered housing developments, and other similar sites. (Planning Commission and Development Review Board)

4. The Town will encourage homeowners who have out-of-date sewage disposal systems and leach fields to upgrade their systems. (Health Officer)
5. The Town will encourage the State to find more effective and less expensive ways to handle sewage, especially for private homes. (Planning Commission)
6. The Town shall explore the feasibility of and development plan for a municipal sewage disposal system that would serve a commercial area in the vicinity of Exit 5 off Interstate 91 and the Town Garage. (Planning Commission)

**TOWN GOVERNMENT**

The annual Town Meeting is held on the Saturday before the first Tuesday in March to elect certain officials, appropriate funds, hear reports and generally conduct the business of the town. Issues to be decided by Australian ballot and election of the Selectboard and other officials are voted on the following Tuesday.

The “general supervision of the affairs of the Town” is by statute committed to a five-member Selectboard. The Selectboard, in turn, appoints a Town Manager, the Zoning Administrator, members of the Planning Commission and the Development Review Board and other officials. The Town Meeting elects other officials, including the Town Clerk, Treasurer, Listers, Town School Directors and Justices of the Peace.

Town Government Policies:

1. To keep town government small and centralized.
2. To actively encourage the participation of community members and volunteers in conducting town business.
3. To enforce local ordinances and regulations.

Town Government Recommendations:

1. The Town shall assure equitable treatment and delivery of services for all residents. (Selectboard and Town Manager)
2. The Town will not take over private facilities such as roads, water systems, etc. unless the Selectboard determines that it is in the public interest to do so. (Selectboard)
3. The Town will encourage citizen participation by advertising for committee members for prospective projects. (Selectboard and Town Manager)
4. The Planning Commission will endeavor to help create temporary town committees that could each focus on the problem of identifying realistic funding resources for a medium or long-term project, such as bicycle lanes on town roads or protected wildlife corridors. (Selectboard and Planning Commission)

**EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES PLAN**

Westminster has two public elementary schools, Westminster Center School in Westminster Village for grades K-6, and Westminster West School in Westminster West Village for grades K-3. The Center School consists of thirteen classrooms, a gymnasium, kitchen, library, separate rooms for special education, art and music, and offices. The Westminster West School consists of two classrooms, a kitchen and a library/resource room. Updated educational technology in both schools includes broadband and wireless internet service, distance learning video, SMART boards and laptop computers.

Westminster Elementary School Population

	<b>2009-2010</b>	<b>2010-2011</b>	<b>2011-2012</b>	<b>2012-2013</b>	<b>2013-2014</b>	<b>2014-2015</b>
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Total K-6	215	215	217	230	180	171
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Westminster Grade 7-8 School Population

	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
Total 7-8	57	64	65	61	68	56

The Town pays tuition for our 7-8 graders to attend an area school such as Bellows Falls Middle School, Compass School, Kurn Hattin, Putney Central Elementary, The Grammar School, Dummerston Elementary School or Hilltop Montessori School. The Town of Westminster receives education spending funds from the State of Vermont for each student's out-of-town tuition.

Tuition per student for each school: FY13 (7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders), Bellows Falls Middle School tuition is \$13,254.00; Putney Central Elementary tuition is \$13,914.00; Dummerston Elementary tuition is \$11,328.00. The other schools listed are private schools and in FY13 they cannot charge the State of Vermont more than the state average or \$12,461.00.

Bellows Falls Union High School, located on 207 acres in Westminster, serves students in grades 9-12 from the Towns of Westminster, Rockingham, Athens and Grafton. Together these towns form the Windham Northeast Supervisory Union.

**Additional Educational Facilities:**

1. New England Kurn Hattin Homes, Inc.: A co-educational elementary boarding school for students needing special attention.
2. The Compass School: An independent middle school and high school.
3. Head Start Program in the SEVCA complex
4. Private Academies: Vermont Academy, The Putney School and other academies are located in nearby towns.
5. Westminster Libraries (Butterfield Library and Westminster West Library): These institutions offer after school programs, lectures and other programs.
6. The Westminster Playgroup: Provides socialization and other skills training for children age 0-5 years.
7. Regional support groups for Home Schooling: The Oak Meadow School (Waldorf inspired pre-school through high school) provides services in the area.
8. Westminster Recreational Programs

**Educational Policies:**

1. To provide high quality education which meets state mandates.
2. To work toward the goal of affordable education for all Westminster residents.
3. To support, in partnership with area business and industry, public and private cooperation in offering vocational and basic skills training.
4. To promote lifetime learning.

**Educational Recommendations:**

1. The Town will encourage programs for preschool and elementary age children that support family activities, such as reading together, and encourage parenting skills programs. (School Board)
2. The Town will monitor the pace of new regional development and population growth in order to evaluate the existing and projected capacity of the Westminster educational system in relation to population growth. (Windham Northeast Supervisory Union, School Board and Superintendent of Schools)
3. The Town will promote nutrition and economics education including the benefits of local food production. (School Board)
4. The Town shall encourage the development of public, private and non-profit programs designed to provide educational programs for all ages. (School Board)

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5. The Town would benefit from life-long learning opportunities. The Town shall encourage announcements of such programs, possibilities and learning opportunities. (School Board and Town Manager)

## **CHILD CARE**

The Vermont Department for Children and Families lists two homes registered to provide child care in Westminster, one on School Street and one on Route 121. Within ten miles of the town's boundaries there are 6 registered homes located in the following towns of Putney, Brookline, Rockingham and Townshend. Within about fifteen miles, there are another 12 providers, including two licensed providers. Of the twelve providers one is located in Dummerston and 11 are located in Springfield. An undetermined number of working parents use the support of relatives or friends to provide informal care for children after school or for children under school age.

Any child care provider that is also recognized by the Vermont Department of Education as a school should also be listed as an educational facility. This would most likely apply to educational programs for children age six and under. Two identified educational programs that enroll children under school age, and which also serve as child care that enables parent employment, are:

- A. The Head Start Program at the SEVCA complex.
- B. The Westminster Playgroup - socialization and skills training for children age 0-5 years.

### Child Care Policies:

1. The Town will support safe and affordable child care programs that enable parents to be employed in full-time occupations.
2. The Town will support educational programs for children after school and for children who are under school age, to meet both the educational needs of the children and the family need for child care during working hours.

### Child Care Recommendations:

1. The Town will monitor the availability and affordability of child care as an important factor in the economic life of the community. (School Board)
2. The Planning Commission will explore recommendations that minimize the obstacles to development permits for child care as a property use or as a permitted structure. (Planning Commission and Development Review Board)
3. The Planning Commission and Selectboard will support the broadest range in land use zones for allowing child care as a permitted or conditional use. (Selectboard, Planning Commission and Development Review Board)

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## TRANSPORTATION

A carefully planned transportation system will promote public safety and protect the rural character and scenic quality of our community. Effective means of transportation are essential to the economic life of the community. Many residents commute out-of-town for employment, school, shopping, obtaining services, and for recreational and cultural activities. The private automobile is and will likely continue to be the principal means of transportation for Westminster residents for the foreseeable future.

We struggle with ongoing concerns about hydrocarbon fuels and the profound impact of emerging energy policies upon our success in protecting the natural environment that we claim as a high-priority community value.

The addition of limited bus service, some expansion of rail service and the construction of a park-and-ride facility indicate a gradual but cautious movement in the direction of less dependence on the personal automobile.

### **Westminster Road Classifications**

Classification:

The Town of Westminster has class 2, 3 and 4 highways that we maintain. We also have a series of legal trails that are mapped and preserved for recreational purposes.

Functional Classification:

The road network in Westminster consists of town roads, a state highway, and a federal highway. As identified on the town's highway map, there are 88.326 miles of roads in Westminster that are maintained by the Town. The network of roadways has been categorized according to the State's town highway classification system and its functional classification.

There are three function classification categories:

1. Arterial Highways - Generally refers to highways used for through traffic. Interstate 91 and Route 5 are two arterial highways.
2. Collector roads - Roads used for getting from residential areas to arterial highways. These include the Westminster West Road, Route 121, the Back Westminster Road, Patch Road, Westminster Heights Road, and Kurn Hattin Road.
3. Local roads - They are the rural/residential streets and roads that make up most of the community's road system.

AOT Design Classification:

1. Class 1 - Those town highways which form the extension of a state highway route and which carry a state highway route number.
2. Class 2 - Those town highways selected as the most important highways in each town. As far as practicable, they shall be selected with the purposes of securing trunk lines of improved highways from town to town and to places which, by their nature, have more than a normal amount of traffic.
3. Class 3 - All traveled town highways other than Class 1 or 2 highways. The minimum standards for Class 3 highways are highways negotiable under normal conditions all seasons of the year by a standard manufactured pleasure car. A highway not meeting this standard may be classified as a provisional Class 3 highway if, within five years of the determination, it will meet all Class 3 highway standards.
4. Class 4 - All other town highways.

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### Road Distances/Classifications for Westminster Maintained Roads

<u>Roads</u>	<u>Miles</u>
Class 1	0.000
Class 2	20.650
Class 3	49.090
<u>State Highways</u>	<u>18.586</u>
Total	88.326
	<u>Plus:</u>
Class 4 (Trails and Pent Roads)	7.520

#### **Road Improvements:**

The Road Commissioner, the Road Foreman, and/or the Selectboard do an ongoing evaluation of the local road conditions. The Road Commissioner, the Road Foreman, and many of the road crew have participated in the Vermont Local Road Program that provides transportation information exchanges at St. Michael's College in Winooski, Vermont.

Most road systems in Westminster were not designed for heavy truck traffic. Therefore, economic development that involves heavy trucking will have a substantial impact on road design, maintenance and replacement. Westminster schedules approximately 1 1/4 miles of repaving a year, but this does not keep up with the actual wear on these roads due to heavy use.

Westminster's problematic areas in transportation are due to spring thaws, flooding and mud season, resulting in difficult ongoing maintenance on some of the gravel roads.

At the present time, Westminster typically has no areas of traffic congestion.

#### **Bridges:**

There are six bridges in Westminster, excluding Interstate 91. Five of these are maintained by the Town and the sixth one is on US Route 5 crossing the Saxton's River which is maintained by the State of Vermont. The reinforced concrete bridge over the Saxtons River at Covered Bridge Road was damaged by tropical storm Irene in August 2011. The repair of that bridge was subject to a complex funding process.

#### **Growth Considerations:**

There is a strong link between transportation facilities and land use patterns. The capacity of Westminster's roads and bridges as well as the land terrain play important roles in defining potential opportunities and limitations for growth and directly influence where development can and cannot be located. Westminster has been zoned for non-residential development on those roads with easiest access to US Interstate Route 91 and with three phase power available. Residential development has taken place for the most part along our Class 2 and Class 3 roads. Westminster has numerous private roads servicing residences.

#### **Planning Initiative:**

Federal and State transportation legislation enacted over the past years has called for greater emphasis on state transportation planning. The Transportation Planning Initiative is the Vermont Agency of Transportation's (VAOT) program designed to meet the goals established by the legislature.

The Planning Initiative involves the decentralization of the VAOT's planning process to the local and regional levels. The planning will be facilitated through the Windham Regional Commission which will be responsible for coordinating with the towns to complete a Regional Transportation Plan.

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Once the Regional Transportation Plan is developed, a Transportation Improvements Program will be prepared which will identify the prioritized list of eligible capital improvement projects within the region. Ultimately, the information prepared in the Transportation Improvements Program will be included in the VAOT Capital Program and Budget.

The following transportation-related resources are available in Westminster:

A. Land Travel

1. Bus: Connecticut River Transit (CRT), a common carrier, runs regular bus routes that include a stop at the train station in Bellows Falls, connecting Westminster with all of New England and the USA. The CRT, or the “Current” Bus Service offers commuter bus service to Bellows Falls, Brattleboro, Dummerston, and Putney, including stops at Westminster Station and Allen Brothers on Route 5.
2. Rail: Amtrak makes two stops daily at the railroad station in Bellows Falls. Central Vermont Railroad stops at Community Feed Store for freight in Westminster. Since the previous Town Plan update, the railroad track has been improved and allows for faster train speeds, but not “high speed” rail transport.
3. Taxi: Service is available from Bellows Falls and Brattleboro.

B. Air Travel

1. Hopkins Airport in Keene, New Hampshire.
2. Hartness State Airport in Springfield, Vermont has facilities for charter flights.
3. Other airports are located in Lebanon and Manchester, New Hampshire; Hartford, Connecticut; and Boston, Massachusetts.

C. Local Facilities

1. The Windham Northeast Supervisory Union owns and operates its own school bus service for all students’ grades Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

D. Ancient Roads

There is currently activity for mapping pertinent Class 4 highways that are ancient roads by definition, by the Selectboard with the direction of the Conservation Committee. The State of Vermont gave the towns this directive to work on these ancient roads / unclassified corridors to get them mapped by Vtrans or possibly lose them. Some old roads that have not been used for decades, including some where property owners claim that the right of way has been abandoned, will lose their status as a public right of way as of July 1, 2015 and revert to the property owner. To date, the Selectboard has viewed and directed the Town Manager on 16 separate roads.

E. Legal Trails

There are 2.91 miles of mapped “Legal Trails” in the Town of Westminster with numerous trail systems from our local associations and private citizens marked and saved for recreational purposes.

Transportation Policies:

1. To ensure that the transportation system in Westminster maximizes public safety and provides convenience commensurate with need, while respecting the integrity of the natural environment and maintaining the community’s scenic, rural character and historic sites.
2. To explore the funding available for public transportation systems, and ways and means to reduce dependency on the personal automobile.
3. To support the use of public transportation alternatives as a means to reduce the cost of living for residents.

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### Transportation Recommendations:

1. The Town will schedule necessary road and bridge improvements to maintain adequate capacity and establish an equitable and affordable means of paying for these improvements. (Selectboard, Town Manager and Road Foreman)
2. The Town will continue reasonable efforts to research old public rights of way to determine where public access still exists. This recommendation may be implemented by the Westminster Conservation Commission. (Conservation Commission)
3. The Town will maintain existing rural roads as gravel roads while pursuing stabilization of problem areas. (Selectboard, Town Manager and Road Foreman)
4. The Town shall continue to install road name signs on all Town roads for the convenience of the public, but especially for use of emergency purposes, i.e. firemen, police, ambulance, and rescue workers. (Selectboard and Road Foreman)
5. The Town will explore the cost-effectiveness of pervious paving materials as a means to reduce the channeling of storm water and icing caused by impervious pavements. (Planning Commission and Development Review Board)
6. The Town will assure that salt or other mineral applications for winter highway safety is accomplished according to best practice standards including the minimum amount of material required to improve vehicle traction with the minimum risk of harm to water and soil resources. (Road Commissioner and Road Foreman)

## **NATURAL RESOURCES**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The health of the natural environment is important to the citizens of Westminster. The purity of the air and water, the abundance of wildlife, and the integrity of land resources are critical contributors to Westminster's strength and character, as well as to the health and welfare of all our citizens. Unless the location, type, and quality of development receive careful attention, the quality of these resources will quickly degrade.

The wise use of Westminster's hills, forests, fields, streams, ponds and rivers and the protection of the landscape beauty are matters of public good. Because of the interconnection of these valuable resources, the policies listed in the following section will overlap and will need to be implemented in conjunction with each other. Natural resources are composed of many elements, which are addressed in the following pages.

### Natural Resources Policies:

1. To be proactive in addressing our conservation issues in our planning and permitting processes.
2. To protect natural resources while supporting appropriate economic development.
3. To protect and preserve significant natural and fragile areas.
4. To protect and preserve outstanding water resources, including ponds, rivers, aquifers, shorelands and wetlands.

### Natural Resources Recommendations:

1. The Town will support the activities of the Conservation Commission. (Selectboard and Town Manager)

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2. The Town will support the Conservation Commission in achieving an understanding of state and federal databases pertaining to the natural resources section and ecology of the area, as well as the location of current conserved lands, so that the Conservation Commission may effectively help to guide future development and land preservation. (Selectboard, Planning Commission and Development Review Board)

## **GROUNDWATER**

Groundwater is one of our Town's most valuable resources. Groundwater provides the primary supply of potable water for Westminster's citizens. Large and potentially productive aquifers are found in the Northeast part of Town. Farther south are smaller aquifers with lower groundwater potential that are usually adequate for domestic use. Depth of wells in the southern part of Town is often over three hundred (300) feet due to the sandy nature of the substrata.

### Groundwater Policies:

1. To protect groundwater resources throughout the Town from contamination by using best available technology.
2. To participate in state efforts to protect groundwater.
3. To limit land uses within wellhead protection areas to those uses which pose no threat of contamination to public water supplies.

### Groundwater Recommendations:

1. The Town shall support the implementation of statewide Good Agricultural Practices (GAP). (Zoning Administrator, Planning Commission and Development Review Board)
2. The Town shall encourage water testing for contamination in wells located near farms. (Selectboard and Health Officer)
3. The Town will ask the State to help protect and monitor wellhead areas and prime agricultural lands along US Route 5, US Route 123 and Interstate 91 by minimizing the application of road salt. (Selectboard and Planning Commission)
4. The Town shall use calibrated salt dispersal to maintain safe and not overly salted roads. (Road Commissioner and Road Foreman)

## **SURFACE WATER/WATERWAYS**

Westminster rivers and streams provide recreational, ecological and aesthetic functions as well as supporting agriculture. We have two rivers, the Connecticut River, which borders our East and the Saxtons River, which runs through North Westminster, emptying into the Connecticut River.

We have many significant streams and brooks, vernal pools, and seasonal runoffs from melting snow and spring rains.

The Connecticut River is an American Heritage River. It figures strongly in the scenic beauty of the area. Its health has been improved over the past several decades. Currently, high nitrogen levels are causing the die off of fish in Long Island Sound. The Town recognizes and encourages the multiple uses of the Connecticut River Corridor, including but not limited to recreation, agriculture, and flood management.

Flood Plain lands have been identified on the Federal Insurance Administration (FIA) Digital Flood Insurance Rate Maps (DFIRM), and on the FIA Flood Boundary and Flood way Maps for the Town of Westminster. These lands will be reserved for agricultural use, recreational use, natural preserves, and other open space uses.

Areas of the Saxtons River that are subject to fluvial erosion hazards, from gradual stream bank erosion to catastrophic channel enlargement, bank failure, and change in course, due to naturally occurring stream channel adjustments, have been identified and mapped in accordance with accepted state fluvial geomorphic assessment and mapping protocols.

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The Flood Hazard Areas Overlay applies to all lands in Westminster that are identified as areas of special flood hazard in and on the most current flood insurance studies and maps published by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), as provided by the Secretary of the Agency of Natural Resources pursuant to 10 V.S.A § 753.

Westminster wishes to protect its rivers, streams, and other surface waters by preserving natural riparian vegetation. This provides shading, shelter, and source of food and travel corridors for aquatic life and wild life.

Surface Water/Waterways Policies:

1. To protect the natural characteristics and visual integrity of our rivers, streams, ponds, and vernal pools while providing for agricultural and recreational uses along our shore-lands.
2. To adopt by reference the Connecticut River Joint Commission (CRJC) Corridor Management Plan as a toolbox of potential planning and land use techniques.
3. To protect shore lands along the Connecticut River including following state and federal guidelines for managing flood prone lands.
4. To encourage sustainable agricultural practices along rivers and streams, this includes supporting farmers in adhering to Acceptable Agricultural Practices as currently defined by the Commissioner of Vermont Department of Agriculture, Food and Markets. (See Section 4413 (d) of Act)
5. To avoid development and other encroachments – including fill, dredging, new structures, parking areas, infrastructure and utilities, and unnecessary public investments, within mapped fluvial erosion hazard areas.
6. Development in Westminster shall be in conformance with the Flood Hazard Areas Overlay District Map.

Surface Water/Waterways Recommendations:

1. The Town shall encourage the use of natural and planted riparian buffers along the rivers and streams to reduce the risk of flood damage and the possibility of pollution. (Planning Commission and Development Review Board)
2. The Town shall require that developers seeking an industrial or commercial permit bordering on a river or stream will meet State requirements regarding potential hazardous waste with the risk of pollutants entering a surface water resource. (Development Review Board)
3. The Town shall adopt policies that mitigate the adverse impacts of run-off into surface waters, and at a minimum will prohibit impervious cover within a designated distance of a river or stream. (Planning Commission)
4. The Town shall conduct stream geomorphic assessments and prepare fluvial erosion hazard area maps and river corridor management plans for all major rivers, streams, and tributaries. (Windham Regional Commission)
5. The Town shall pursue improved river corridor protection by adding fluvial erosion hazard areas to the areas protected by the flood hazard overlay. (Planning Commission)
6. The Town shall refer farmers and citizens to the Windham Natural Resources Conservation District or the water quality division of the VT ANR for needed assistance with meeting Acceptable Agricultural Practices. (Zoning Administrator and Planning Commission)

**WETLANDS**

A wetland is an open area of land where water is sufficient to support vegetation and/or aquatic life that depends on saturated or seasonally saturated areas for growth and production. Wetlands are commonly known as marshes, swamp, bogs, fens, mudflats, beaver flowage, vernal pools and other similar areas.

Wetlands are valuable natural resources that provide benefits to people and the environment. Some of these functions and benefits are (1) fish, wildlife, migratory bird and rare or endangered species habitats; (2) water quality protection and ground water recharge; (3) storm and flood water storage; (4) erosion and shoreline stabilization; (5) education and research; (6) recreation and scenic enjoyment.

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In the Town of Westminster, there are no designated Class I wetlands. There are four hundred ninety-five (495) acres of Class II wetlands and a significant acreage of non-designated wetlands. The approximate location of our Class II wetlands are shown on the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) online mapping tool under Vermont Significant Wetland Inventory (VSWI) map and are protected through federal programs and the Vermont Wetlands Rules. All wetlands of one half an acre and larger, vernal pools and other significant wetland features are also protected under Vermont Wetland Rules.

Vermont's Environmental Act 250 also has bearing on development within or near wetlands.

Wetlands Policies:

1. To protect Class II and significant wetlands from development.
2. To protect Class II wetlands and significant wetlands, including: wetlands over ½ acre, vernal pools and beaver ponds that have been flooded for two (2) or more years, and the areas surrounding them from activities resulting in filling, altering, draining, runoff or discharge, which would diminish the benefits and functions that the wetland provides, thus adhering to Vermont Wetland Rules.
3. To adhere to Vermont Wetland Rules.

Wetlands Recommendations:

1. The Town shall adopt policies that protect Class II wetlands that maintain an undisturbed naturally vegetated buffer strip around the wetland edge, sufficient to ensure the integrity of the wetlands. A one hundred (100) foot buffer zone is recommended, with a minimum of fifty (50) feet. (Planning Commission and Development Review Board)
2. The Town shall take action to protect Class II and significant wetlands from development according to the environmental conservation wetland requirements as stated in the Vermont Wetland Rules and Federal guidelines for wetlands.  
(Planning Commission and Development Review Board)
3. The Town shall refer new landowners of lands containing wetlands to Vermont Wetland Rules.  
(Zoning Administrator)

**FISH AND WILDLIFE**

Our Town has a large and diverse wild animal population that includes, among others, deer, moose, fox, bear, rabbit, squirrel, chipmunk, muskrat, beaver, fisher, raccoon, porcupine, woodchuck, skunk, bobcat, coyote, songbirds, turkey, pheasant, grouse, quail, owl, hawk, eagle, vulture, duck, goose, bittern, heron, crane and water dwellers like frog, turtle, many amphibians, crustaceans, diverse fish life and numerous non-vertebrates.

We realize that in order for future generations to enjoy a stable population of wildlife, we must enact and maintain ordinances to insure consistently high water quality in our streams and rivers, contiguous open land for movement and health of animals, wetland and forest preservation, and secure breeding and wintering habitat.

Data about Rare, Endangered and Uncommon Species is maintained by the Wildlife Diversity division of the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife and can be located on the map layers in the Vermont Natural Resources Atlas pertaining to Rare and Endangered Species and Uncommon Species.

Fish and Wildlife Policy:

1. To protect and preserve wildlife and fish habitat and populations.

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#### Fish and Wildlife Recommendations:

1. The Town will limit high density residential and commercial or industrial development to areas that will not infringe upon critical wildlife habitats. (Planning Commission, Conservation Commission and Development Review Board)
2. The Town shall encourage landowners to convey their property into conservation easement areas. (Planning Commission, Conservation Commission and Development Review Board)
3. The DRB and Zoning Administrator shall consult the State of Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) maps to obtain most up to date information when considering development applications. (Zoning Administrator and Development Review Board)
4. The Town shall cooperate with other Towns, as well as the Windham Regional Commission, the Natural Resources Conservation District, State and Federal officials in order to identify the critical areas for wild animal and fish preservation. (Zoning Administrator, Planning Commission, Conservation Commission and Development Review Board)
5. The Town will contact the State Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) for help in conducting studies on wildlife corridors. (Zoning Administrator and Planning Commission)

#### **NATURAL AREAS**

Locally significant natural communities are designated and managed by the Secretary of the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. There are no designated fragile areas in Westminister. Significant Natural Areas are designated and managed by the Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation. Some threatened, and endangered species and significant natural communities have been identified in the Town of Westminister and are protected by the Vermont Endangered Species laws and Federal Endangered Species Act. These areas are on private lands and are not available to the general public without permission. Rare species are not protected by state or federal laws but are identified for local actions.

The data about Significant Natural Communities is maintained by the Wildlife Diversity division of the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife and can be located on the three map layers in the Vermont Natural Resources Atlas pertaining to Natural communities, Rare and Endangered Species and Uncommon Species.

#### Natural Areas Policy:

1. To protect native plant and animal species and their ecosystems by planning development that will minimize impact on these areas.

#### Natural Areas Recommendations:

1. The Town with the aid of the Conservation Commission shall support state, federal and local conservation groups in identifying and acquiring lands or easements to protect critical plant and animal habits with adequate compensation to landowner and when such action does not undermine the property tax base of the Town. (Selectboard, Planning Commission and Conservation Commission)
2. The Town shall provide information to private and public landowners regarding the importance of protecting, maintaining, and enhancing critical plant or animal habitats and ecosystems by supporting a variety of community, regional, and state education and incentive programs. (Zoning Administrator and Conservation Commission)
3. The Town shall support the designation of Locally Significant Natural Communities for those lands with significant features and resources. (Selectboard and Planning Commission)

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## SCENIC RESOURCES

Westminster offers its residents and visitors a special scenic attractiveness and historic character. Our four (4) villages are separated by rural countryside. Westminster West, with its handsome church and picturesque little library has shown little change over the years. North Westminster, with the old Community Center building and historic saw mill still in use also has shown very little change. The registered historic Westminster Village, with the King's Highway, lined with well-kept houses, some built in the 18th century, tall trees and gardens, seemingly endless fields of corn and vegetables behind them, the farm stands, and our unique and historic Town Hall. The fourth village, Westminster Station is closely tied to both a commercial district and extensive agricultural land at the crossroad into New Hampshire. All of Westminster's villages reflect a pride of place and love of the soil that Westminster has maintained throughout our long history. Between the villages are scenic farmlands and forested hillsides.

The people of Westminster do not intend to change this special scenic attractiveness and historic character. Our aim is to keep our agricultural land intact, our forests healthy, our ridgelines natural, our highway border screened, our residential development appropriate, our commercial and industrial growth appropriate, our villages intact, and our river and stream frontage protected for generations to come.

### Scenic Resources Policies:

1. To protect our scenic resources by preserving our historic buildings, landmarks and archaeological sites and other scenic lands.
2. The Town has developed a Ridgeline Protection Overlay District (RPOD) in order to protect Westminster's rural character and scenic landscape by ensuring that development is located and designed in a manner that protects the uninterrupted skyline and minimizes adverse visual impact on designated ridgelines, hilltops and adjacent slopes.

### Scenic Resources Recommendations:

1. The Town shall develop and implement guidelines for the screening of the interstate and the preservation of our scenic agricultural lands and riverbanks. (Planning Commission and Development Review Board)
2. The Town shall encourage the maintenance and preservation of lands in order to enhance the protection of the Windmill Ridge Nature Reserve and Trails. (Planning Commission and Development Review Board)
3. The Town shall encourage the donation of scenic easements on private property to public and private resource/conservation agencies and organizations. (Planning Commission and Conservation Commission)
4. The Town shall encourage incentives for preserving scenic lands that may be subject to development and when such action does not undermine the property tax base of the Town. (Selectboard and Planning Commission)
5. The Town shall encourage the construction of new towers or facilities in town that will not detract from the scenic attractiveness and historic character of the area, in accordance with the telecommunications article of the Zoning Bylaw. (Planning Commission and Development Review Board)
6. The Town shall encourage use of exterior illumination designed to minimize its impact on the appearance of the night landscape. (Planning Commission and Development Review Board)
7. The Town shall encourage careful planning of new or improved roads and public access walking trails to maintain or enhance scenic resources. (Selectboard, Conservation Commission, Planning Commission and Road Commissioner)
8. The Town shall cooperate with the Connecticut River Scenic By-Ways program to enhance the enjoyment of our great river valley by our citizens and visitors. (Planning Commissioner and Conservation Commission)
9. The Town shall support the Conservation Commission in updating the location of Ancient Roads on State and Town maps. (Selectboard and Town Manager)

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## **AGRICULTURE**

The Connecticut River bottomlands and the limestone-rich valley and slopes of the western part of Westminister are well suited for agriculture; and it is not by accident that Westminister is home to some of the most notable farms in Windham County. The farms and farmers of Westminister are diverse. Some are organically certified and some are farming non-organically. There are small, medium and large dairy farms. Five (5) dairy farms sell their milk to the wholesale markets. There are farms that produce sheep cheese, sell fresh eggs and raise various animals for their meats. There are at least ten (10) vegetable farms that are farmed on a full-time basis and sell their produce wholesale, retail, through Community Supported Agriculture, (CSA) and roadside farm stands. There are also numerous “back yard” farmers who raise their own animals for meat or vegetables to supply their homes with food. There are some farms in Westminister that contribute to Farm-To-Plate organizations that distribute locally grown, fresh and nutritious food to our schools.

Many contribute to the Vermont Food Bank and other non-profit organizations. There are nine (9) organic farms in Westminister at this time and eleven (11) sugar bushes, including two of the largest in the state, producing pure Vermont maple syrup.

Farm shops and product diversity should continue and be encouraged. This goes well with the current and popular trend in the State of Vermont and the country as a whole. Producing, selling or buying locally grown agriculture products is on the rise and has been recognized as important to Vermont’s economic development. Farm stands, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), Wholesale, Value added products, Farm-To-Plate organizations, Vermont Food Bank and other such non-profit groups and agri-tourism all add to an important economic development mix in the State of Vermont and are just as important to the Town of Westminister’s economic development, as well.

The open land along the Connecticut River contains some of the best soils in the state. The fields are level, with fine and medium textured soils that are free of stones. In Westminister West, there is a narrow band of limestone tainted with iron, no more than a couple of miles wide, which runs north south through Windham County. Within this band, lie most of the hill farms that remain in Windham County, including the flourishing farms of Westminister West. Nine (9) of the farms in Westminister farm organically; that is, farming without the use of petroleum-based fertilizers, chemical pesticides or herbicides and without genetically modified organics (GMO) seeds or plants and other methods that are needed in the compliance of organic certification.

If Westminister is able to hold onto its land and farmers, the Town will do well in the future, for agriculture is critical to the Town’s economic development. Keeping local produce in the local market will help maintain the beauty and farmland of the Town and make farming more viable. By supporting ecologically sound farming, the Town will provide residents with healthy food and will protect water quality, as fewer toxic pesticides will be used.

### Agriculture Policies:

1. To preserve farming as a viable occupation and part of the community.
2. To enforce the Agricultural Overlay District in its development planning.

### Agriculture Recommendations:

1. The Town shall support the purchase or gifting of development rights of agricultural land as a benefit to the entire community. (Planning Commission, Development Review Board and Zoning Administrator)
2. The Town shall encourage sustainable farming practices in order to protect our water resources, provide healthier food, protect wildlife, and maintain the long-term health and vitality of our soils. (Planning Commission, Development Review Board and Zoning Administrator)
3. The Town shall support value-added processes on the farm, diversification of products, and local marketing efforts. It shall support small processing businesses for farm products, such as cheese making, freezing and canning vegetables and fruits, cider/juice making, flourmills, and meat and fish processing plants. (Planning Commission, Development Review Board and Zoning Administrator)

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4. The Town shall encourage the distribution of locally produced food to those in need. (Selectboard, Town Manager and Public Funds Committee)
  5. The Town shall continue to support the agricultural educational program in our schools. (School Board)
  6. The Town shall continue to support the Use Value Appraisal Program. (Selectboard)
  7. The Town shall encourage zoning practices that preserve and protect locally significant agricultural lands. (Planning Commission, Development Review Board, Selectboard and Zoning Administrator)
  8. The Town shall encourage farmers to adhere to Good Agricultural Practices. (Planning Commission, Development Board and Zoning Administrator)
  9. The Town shall refer farmers to the UVM Extension Service and other State Agricultural agencies for enhancing educational outreach to the farming community. (Zoning Administrator)

## **FOREST LANDS**

Of Westminster's 29,000 +/- acres, approximately seventy percent (70%) is forest. This includes both privately owned land, four town-owned forests totaling 400+/- acres (Holton, Filippi, Davenport, and Aiken) as shown on the Natural Resources map for Westminster, the Bellows Falls Union High School forest (150 acres +/-) and the Windmill Hill and Bald Hill Nature Reserves and Trails (1164 acres +/-). The Town has two (2) sawmills, eleven (11) maple sugaring businesses, (3) timber harvesters and over one hundred (100) parcels (in excess of 10,000 acres) that participate in the use value appraisal (current land use) program. Predominant tree species include black locust, red oak, hickory, beech, birch, maple, eastern hemlock, white pine and white ash. With over seventy percent (70%) of the Town made up of forestland, careful consideration must be given to the sustainability of this resource in the town planning process.

Sustainable uses fall into four (4) overlapping categories, hereafter described. Forest preservation depends on understanding and tracking the resources and potential resources in each forest parcel, as well as attending to the overall balance of resources within the town. Some individual lots may be better suited to single use and others to an overlapping and integrated use management.

- 1) Forest- based industries: Protecting our economy, heritage, and rural character are vital to Westminster. It is essential that careful planning by foresters occurs to enhance future forest products. Westminster has access to state, county, and private foresters to assist with planning.
- 2) Wildlife habitat: Diversity of forest type is essential in preserving wildlife habitats. It is important to evaluate existing wildlife habitats and to consider those in the forest planning process so as to avoid forest use conflicting with wildlife preservation. Key habitat components include hard mast, soft mast, den trees, small herbaceous openings, and ledges, rocks, and outcrop.
- 3) Recreation: Currently residents have use of forestland (Aiken, Filippi, Davenport, and Holton lots) belonging to the Town, the Bellows Falls Union High School forest, and Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association lands. Recreational use requires tracts of connected land. Logging roads, farm trails and town rights-of-way are used for hiking and skiing on private and public land.
- 4) Aesthetic Values: Scenic landscape is an important resource for the Town. Distance (foreground, middle, and background), topography (slope, ridgelines, contrasts providing shape and texture), forest cover (mixture of broad leaf and evergreen), special features, visibility and protective screening are aesthetic criteria that need to be considered. Vermont's Environmental Act 200 identifies the need for protecting scenic resources.

### Forest Lands Policies:

1. To enhance and protect our forest resources.
2. To adopt zoning bylaws and policies that supports the long term health of forestlands.

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### Forest Lands Recommendations:

1. The Town shall encourage the Conservation Commission to work in conjunction with local environmental graduate programs to do environmental assessments of forestlands. (Selectboard, Town Manager and Conservation Commission)
2. The Town shall obtain, if feasible, appropriate forestland that could enhance those already owned by the Town and Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association for public recreational use wildlife habitat, and aesthetic value. Special attention will be given to lands that would connect already protected lots. (Selectboard and Planning Commission)
3. The Town shall encourage: (A) participation in the Use Value Appraisal Program; and (B) purchase or gifting of development rights to land trusts to encourage the preservation of prime forestland and continuous connection of forest properties. (Selectboard and Town Manager)
4. The Town shall prohibit the use of all-terrain vehicles on Town forest property and limit snowmobile use to designated trails in order to protect sensitive wildlife habitats and to protect the safety of others using these lands. (Selectboard and Town Manager)
5. The Town shall support and encourage the efforts for recreational and educational use of town lands and those of the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association. They shall encourage adequate parking, trail and boundary markers, and ongoing trail maintenance. (Selectboard and Conservation Commission)
6. The Town shall encourage zoning that prevents the further fragmentation of forestlands. (Planning Commission, Selectboard and Development Review Board)
7. The Town shall encourage landowners to adhere to Accepted Management Practices (AMP's) as currently defined by the Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation. ("The Act" Chapter 117, Title 24) (Planning Commission and Zoning Administrator)
8. The Town shall provide information to landowners on resources available on state and county level to assist them with forest resources planning. (Zoning Administrator)

### **EARTH AND MINERAL RESOURCES**

Our existence depends upon only a few inches of good, rich topsoil with varying depths of subsoil beneath it, and ten (10) different rock types forming our bedrock. This entire area was covered by glacial till during the Ice Age by up to four (4) different glacial periods. This till can vary greatly in composition from fine sand to large boulders, and in depth from a few inches to over one hundred (100) feet.

Within our borders we have a formation of soapstone, two (2) inactive rock quarries, and many areas in which sand, clay and gravel could be, and still are, removed. We also have three (3) historic lime kilns.

#### General Soils Types:

Soils in Westminster are glacial in origin and belong primarily to three groups, (1) Quonset -Windsor-Warwick, (2) Tunbridge-Marlow-Lyman, and (3) Dummerston-Macomber-Taconic.

#### Agricultural Soils:

Westminster has some of the state's prime agricultural land, with much of it lying in the flood plains. These lands have been identified on the Federal Insurance Administration (FIA) Digital Flood Insurance Rate Maps (DFIRM) and on the FIA Flood Boundary and Floodway Maps for the Town of Westminster. Most of this land borders the Connecticut River and is currently in agricultural use. Our prime agricultural overlay district was identified using the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment System in 1990.

#### Forest Soils:

Approximately seventy percent (70%) of Westminster's lands are forested. Our forested lands provide rich wildlife habitat and a source of income for those community members who market maple syrup products, firewood, timber, fruit, and Christmas trees, all of which are identified on Westminster's Forest Productivity Map.

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#### Earth and Mineral Resources Policies:

1. To ensure that commercial earth and mineral extraction is carried out in a manner and in locations that result in minimal adverse impact to the environment and character of the surrounding area.
2. To encourage judicious use of the mineral resources within the town borders, taking into account physical and regulatory constraints.
3. To reserve Flood Plain lands for agricultural use, recreational use, nature preserves, and other open space uses that do not compromise flood water assimilating capacity.
4. To discourage development on wet soils.

#### Earth and Mineral Resources Recommendations:

1. The Town shall require proper restoration work on lands where commercial earth and mineral extraction occurs. (Development Review Board, Planning Commission and Zoning Administrator)
2. The Town shall adopt Zoning by-laws that will minimize earth disturbances on slopes for which such disturbances will result in erosion and other environmental problems.  
(Planning Commission, Development Review Board and Zoning Administrator)
3. The Town shall ensure that non-agricultural and non-forest related development is designed to minimize adverse impacts on existing or potential agricultural or forest soils.  
(Planning Commission, Development Review Board and Zoning Administrator)
4. The Town shall ensure that soil characteristics are considered in conjunction with the formulation of land use controls (zoning, septic, geography, etc.) (Development Review Board)
5. The Town shall only allow uses of Flood Plain lands which do not restrict or divert the flow of flood waters or endanger the health, safety, and welfare of the public during flooding. (Planning Commission, Zoning Administrator and Development Review Board)
6. The Town shall contact the County Forester in instances where it appears that logging activities do not conform to Acceptable Management Practices. (Zoning Administrator)
7. The Town, through the Development Review Board, shall ensure that construction activities on steep slopes with shallow soils conform to an erosion control plan for the construction phases of the operation, and to a site drainage plan. (Development Review Board)

### **RECREATIONAL, HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES**

#### **Recreational Resources**

Westminster is the town with the most land in Windham County. Four hundred (400 +/-) acres are owned by the Town for outdoor recreation (parks, playgrounds, athletic fields). Included in this acreage are the two (2) Town forests, the Senator Aiken Forest and the Sarah Davenport Forest, and the BFUHS public forest.

With the financial assistance of the State, the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association (WHPA) in Westminster has conserved and made available to the public 1,850 acres of hills and woods for non-motorized recreation, including hunting in many areas. The Bald Hill Reserve abutting the Bellows Falls Union High School forest is part of WHPA. A map of these and other recreational facilities within the Town borders can be found on the Town community facilities map to help interested parties identify and use these recreational facilities. Trail maps are available at trailhead kiosks.

#### Recreational Areas Policy:

1. To maximize the recreational opportunities available to town residents within the limits of the resources available.

#### Recreational Areas Recommendations:

1. The Town shall support the use of recreational resources within the Town, including but not limited to snowmobile clubs (local and state), the Westminster Recreational Club, Connecticut River Scenic By-way Association, and the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association.  
(Selectboard and Town Manager)

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2. The Conservation Commission shall develop a list of recreational opportunities and make the list available to residents. At a minimum this shall include public recreational opportunities, as well as those associated with schools located in town and those areas available to the public through covenants for public use, and any private recreational areas for which public use permission has been granted. (Conservation Commission and Town Manager)
  3. The Town shall support the orderly development of needed public and private recreational facilities. (Planning Commission and Town Manager)
  4. The Planning Commission will explore the feasibility of sidewalks and walking/biking trails. (Planning Commission) (Please note also that this is an old recommendation that requires a special committee to explore feasibility and reasonable deadlines to accomplish steps to be taken toward implementation)
  5. The Planning Commission will explore the feasibility of enhancement of public access to surface waters, including the Saxtons River and Connecticut River. (Planning Commission)

### **Historic and Cultural Resources**

Westminster is a historic town, dating back to the land grants in the early 1700's. Among its many firsts is the distinction of being the first Town chartered in what is now Vermont. Our rich and varied history is reflected in our landscape and architecture. The historic buildings located in Westminster Village have been protected through designation as a historic district. The Town's Historic Review Board assures that all new construction in the Historic District is accomplished in a manner that preserves the character of the District. The Westminster Historical Society is instrumental in preserving the archives and artifacts pertaining to the history of the Town.

Cultural resources in town are those typically found in small rural areas.

The following is a partial list of significant public historical and cultural resources in town:

Town Halls: East Parish (c 1889), West Parish (early 1800's), North Westminster Community House (c 1930).

Libraries: Westminster West Library (approximately 1920), Butterfield Library in the Westminster Institute (c 1923).

Churches: Westminster Congregational Church, Congregational Church of Westminster West, Christian Family Circle.

Cemeteries: Old East Parish, New East Parish, both located in Westminster Center, West Parish in Westminster West, Oak Hill in North Westminster, Catholic and Sacred Heart, at Cemetery Road off US Route 5. There are approximately 12 other cemeteries that are not listed, as they are private.

There are many historic and cultural sites within the Town. Most of these are within the Historical Preservation District. Major sites are:

The Westminster Massacre (1775) Marker, William French Monument, Water Trough at the Town Hall, Bradley Law Office, Westminster Institute. Other historic and cultural sites, such as lime kilns, stone bridges and old foundations, including cellar holes and mill foundations, can be found throughout the Town.

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### Historic and Cultural Resources Policies:

1. To preserve our historic heritage, both in the historic district and throughout the Town.
2. To ensure that Town owned historic and cultural sites are maintained and restored appropriately.
3. The Town will encourage maintenance and restoration of identified historic and cultural sites.
4. The Town will support public access to historic sites and historic information.

### Historic and Cultural Resources Recommendations:

1. The Town shall work to ensure that major historical structures and markers are maintained, restored, documented and marked appropriately. (Town Manager and Westminster Historical Society)
2. The Town shall encourage the protection of the original north-south range lines and east-west lot lines, and their intersections. These lines, often marked by stone walls, are crucial in title searching and the determination of property lines. (Zoning Administrator)
3. The Town shall encourage the owners of old homes to do a title search and record it with the Westminster Historical Society. (Zoning Administrator)
4. The Town shall work to protect the historic sites and structures that are eligible for inclusion in the Vermont or National Register of Historic Places. (Zoning Administrator and Town Manager)
5. The Town will encourage the Westminster Historical Society to identify critical historic resources in need of repair, develop a priority list, and help find funding.  
(Westminster Historical Society and Town Manager)

## **ENERGY**

As Americans we use tremendous amounts of energy. We need to continue to work to lower our energy consumption in order to lessen our impact on natural resources, for financial reasons and to decrease both oil dependency and greenhouse gas emissions.

### **Energy Planning**

Westminster is, and most likely will continue to be, dependent on energy sources generated or imported from outside its borders. Although energy resources are a necessity for transportation, heating, lighting, business, industry, electrical generation and human work (labor) in our community, the control of supplies and policy is presently largely in the hands of state and federal government and international energy suppliers. The role of towns in planning for solar and wind generation installations is determined by state regulations depending on the actions of the Vermont Energy Generation Siting Policy Commission (2013). Further details may be found in the Act.

Little progress has been made statewide toward decreasing our energy usage in transportation and heating. Our overall energy use is 52% petroleum based, 6% natural gas and 42% nuclear and renewable (2011 Vermont Comprehensive Energy Plan). In 2009 the commercial and industrial sector used 37% of the energy, transportation required 35% and households 31%.

The Town's main supplier of electricity, Green Mountain Power Corporation, projected for 2013 that it would purchase electricity generated from hydropower (46.8%), wind (9.3%) (Up from .2 in 2011), oil and natural gas (8%), nuclear power (6.5%), wood (3.8%), methane (1.4%), solar (.5%), with another 23.7% to come from various open market sources.

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The goal of Vermont's Comprehensive Energy Plan (CEP) is for Vermont to obtain 90% of its total energy from renewable sources by 2050. Vermont currently obtains less than one quarter of the energy it uses from renewable sources. The path to obtaining this goal will involve gains in energy efficiency, conservation and the development of renewable energy sources.

CEP calls for aggressive goals for energy efficiency and code compliance in new construction, while supporting greater use of bio-blended fuels and renewable energy technologies. Regional and local efforts play an important role in energy efficiency, conservation and in the development of local energy sources through control of local land use, solid waste management practices, transportation systems and educational outreach to its residences and businesses.

### **Current Energy Use**

Home Heating and other space heating: Home heating is the largest consumer of domestic energy. Our schools and businesses will also benefit from efficiency efforts and new technologies. The State estimates that 59% of households heat with fuel or kerosene, 14% with bottled or LP gas, 12% with utility gas, 9.5% with wood and the rest with electricity, coal or other fuels. Westminster's use of wood is higher than this.

### **Electrical needs**

Hot water systems (also heated with propane), lighting, pumping water, refrigeration, clothes drying and air conditioning are some of the larger consumers of electricity. There is a lot of room for improvement in these areas. There are several ways to lower energy usage of and costs to homeowners. Residents can make use of innovative pumping and gravity systems for water and energy efficient lighting and appliances. Energy saving behaviors, including turning off lights, hanging laundry, and conserving water decreases electricity use significantly.

### **Transportation**

Automobiles also consume a large percentage of Westminster's energy budget. Because of limited employment opportunities in our Town, 78% of our inhabitants commute to work, with an average commuting time of 21.6 minutes. The use of public transportation has increased with the Current Bus, which has a regular schedule running between Bellows Falls to Brattleboro (U.S. Census 2010 shows 35 people using public transportation, up from 3 in 2000). The Park and Ride located at Exit 5 facilitates carpooling for many residents. 252 people reported carpooling in 2010 up from 153 in U.S. Census 2000. During the last 10 years the number of people working at home increased from 70 to 108.

### **Solid Waste**

Reducing the amount of solid waste generated by homes and businesses provides the greatest energy savings and consequently the greatest cost savings of all. These practices and recycling reduce air pollution, water pollution and industrial water use, and provide energy savings, while diminishing our reliance on incineration and landfill usage. Westminster residents are asked to recycle; making use of the Rockingham-Westminster Recycling Center located in Westminster and the bins at the Town Garage and in Putney. Recycling should be an important aspect of our community's solid waste management system. Curbside trash and recycling pick-up in town is currently being contracted as of this printing.

A recent update of the Vermont Solid Waste Bill, Act 148 (H.485), will be instituting a ban on certain solid waste. By fiscal year 2015 this includes recyclables, by 2016 it includes leaf and yard residuals and clean wood waste. Removing these items will significantly reduce the financial and fuel costs of haulage and disposal of solid waste in town.

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## **Local Land Use**

Included in local zoning, are bylaws that provide for Planned Unit Developments ("PUD's") to allow for the clustering of development and therefore the reduction of energy required to provide essential services.

The Town can directly support the implementation of energy conservation measures by participating in the Act 250 review process. Development of subdivisions involving Act 250 reviews is required to "reflect the principles of energy conservation and utilize the best available technology for energy efficiency."

Proper home and subdivision design and construction, including building orientation can greatly increase energy savings. Creating developments close to major roads and existing settlements minimizes energy consumed by residents commuting and reduces energy required to deliver essential services. Thoughtful siting, design and construction of buildings significantly lowers energy requirements for individual homes and businesses.

## **Energy Resources Analysis**

Westminster has several potential renewable energy resources: solar, wood, hydro, and wind. Except for wood, these resources are not being used extensively. Research shows the use of passive solar heating and photovoltaic electrical generation is a viable means of diminishing our dependency on outside sources of non-renewable energy. In the past 8 years this Town has seen the installation of several solar arrays that are grid tied.

Under net metering the power these panels produce is fed into the grid, and the meter of the homeowner or business spins backward. Green Mountain Power Corporation purchased .1% of their power from solar in 2011 and anticipates purchasing .5% in 2013.

Wind energy is clean and renewable. Commercial wind developments are typically sited along ridgelines and mountaintops at 2000-3500 feet, therefore Westminster should not anticipate commercial scale wind energy development. The feasibility of small turbine development is dependent on elevation and wind speed. By Vermont law, communities can only regulate systems that are not tied into the power grid.

The Town has supported sound and sustainable forest management that encourages the use of wood for heating purposes and provides local jobs. The Town encourages the use of wood stoves that meet US Environmental Protection Agency standards for emission controls and maximum heating efficiency.

Hydro can be very expensive and availability of access to potentially large systems is very limited within Westminster. There is potential for small systems to be installed on streams and brooks. Some mini systems require very little flow and are regulated by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). The FERC currently allows construction of a 10-Megawatt generator requiring only simple notice to the Commission.

Westminster's energy practices and policies should anticipate potential future problem areas, such as shortages of fossil fuels, rising petroleum costs, and increases in electrical rates. Any efforts to reduce the use of non-renewable energy will benefit everyone. Providing education on practices of conservation is an effective way of lessening this dependency.

## Energy Policies:

1. To promote energy conservation and use of renewable resources in a way that does not adversely impact agricultural land, natural resources, scenic resources or lands designated for commercial or industrial use.
2. To support programs for insulation and weatherization of existing dwellings, especially for low and moderate-income households.
3. To promote connections between major activity centers by bicycle/foot paths to encourage non-automobile travel. These paths can be tied into neighboring bike paths including Walpole's.

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4. To encourage land use patterns that concentrate housing, work opportunities and social services toward the existing villages in order to conserve energy by placing less demand on transportation.  
For example: encourage Planned Unit Developments on small lots in villages.
  5. To encourage housing development that considers energy conservation by siting buildings for solar gains and minimized road construction.
  6. To promote residential connection of alternative energy systems to the electric power grid under net-metering.
  7. To encourage local taxation of commercial energy generation.
  8. To ensure that future energy infra-structure falls within (or as closely as possible) to existing rights-of-ways or corridors.
  9. The Town will accept or adopt innovative energy technologies cautiously, with all due regard for the public health and safety, both as to power production and power transmission and transport of chemicals.
  10. To control the flow of recyclables into the solid waste stream.

Energy Recommendations:

1. Make energy efficiency and energy conservation information available in the Town Hall for the public. (Town Manager)
2. Facilitate use and awareness of renewable and alternative energy sources such as wood, solar, wind and hydropower. (Town Manager and Zoning Administrator)
3. The Town shall promote carpooling through maintenance of park and ride at Exit 5. Further efforts could go to developing carpool boards, located at Town Hall and in Westminster West Village. (Town Manager and Town Highway Department)
4. All affordable efforts to improve energy efficiency should be used when constructing, maintaining or retrofitting public facilities. (Zoning Administrator and Development Review Board)
5. The Town shall work to make residents aware of recent state energy codes. (Zoning Administrator)
6. The Town shall encourage the institution of an energy awareness curriculum in schools. (School Board)
7. The Town shall develop guidelines for energy conservation to be used in site plan or conditional use review. Whenever possible, development should be encouraged only in areas with characteristics most suitable for maximum energy conservation, including southern orientation and protective wind barriers. (Development Review Board and Planning Commission)
8. The Town will provide information about resources for building energy efficient homes and businesses, including The Vermont Residential and Commercial Building Energy Codes and LEED, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. (Zoning Administrator)
9. Residential energy conservation programs that conduct energy audits and/or provide weatherization services for existing homes, especially for low income homes, should be fully utilized and promoted through information outreach. (Zoning Administrator)
10. Encourage the retro-fitting of existing structures with energy saving measures such as insulation, storm windows, heating equipment, and energy efficient appliances. (Zoning Administrator)
11. The use of on-site or locally obtainable renewable energy sources should be encouraged as long as it is consistent with resource conservation policies of this Plan, including air quality. (Planning Commission, Zoning Administrator and Development Review Board)
12. Set design standards for residential wind energy systems for inclusion in the Zoning Bylaw. (Planning Commission and Development Review Board)
13. The Town shall encourage the posting of “No Idling” signs at public facilities and businesses. (Town Manager)
14. The Town will re-establish a Town Energy Committee to help keep the town informed of all significant energy issues, and communicate the issues with residents effectively. (Selectboard)

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## HOUSING

A brief survey of real estate for sale showed homes listed from very small to 3 bedrooms and 2 baths, from \$49,000 to \$649,000, on lots from 1 acre to 23 acres. Land for sale prepared for new construction can be \$3,000 an acre, or fully prepared for business use under Act 250 at \$40,000 an acre. All housing costs at this time have been influenced by unemployment, lending, banking and investment issues nationwide.

Westminster has affordable housing including Shady Pines Trailer Park on Back Westminster Road and the Westminster Housing Apartments on Route 5, but the development pressure for new house construction is weak.

The residential development applications for the most recent three years included 30 for additions and 31 for accessory buildings (barn, garage, shed) and 11 for new homes. There were no applications for Planned Unit Developments for 5 or more houses or rental apartments or condominiums. Participants in the Town Planning Committee meetings presented concerns that new home construction is too expensive and discourages families from moving into Westminster.

However, the major factors that determine the cost of a new home are the price of a drilled water well and septic system – subject to state regulations – and the costs of materials and labor. Using zoning bylaws to allow for smaller lots would not necessarily reduce new construction costs. Having suitable locations for the well, septic system and the house itself is more likely to occur at moderate costs on five acres of Westminster land than on one or two acres. Development costs can be higher due to the terrain, soil types and space limitations on a smaller parcel. A serious effort to reduce housing costs in Westminster would require more study and detailed research into cost factors that might be controlled by a local ordinance.

### Housing Statistics:

For data year 2010:

Total units	Occupied	Single unit	Multiple	Mobile Home
1,424	1,349	1,129	188	107

For data year 2010:

Household size	Family size	Seasonal	Vacant	Owner	Renter
2.58	3.06	108	1.4%	1,007	239

Seasonal and Recreational Housing (108/1,424) = 7.5%

### Housing Policies:

1. The Town will support the use of building materials and methods of construction that reduce the cost of building or maintaining residential dwellings without unacceptable reduction of safety and durability.
2. The Town will support construction of affordable housing for the elderly and handicapped.
3. The Town will support efforts to reduce the costs of all residential dwellings by means of alternatives to the conventional and most expensive methods of providing for sewage treatment and disposal.
4. The Planning Commission will seek data and research on dwelling costs, lot sizes, and the Town's environmental considerations.
5. The Planning Commission will explore the possibility of zoning bylaws that will promote village centers, neighborhood living or housing clusters as opposed to making the roadsides of major roads the residential zone.

### Housing Recommendations:

1. The Town will encourage participation in programs that have been established to assist in providing funding for housing improvements. (Selectboard and Town Manager)

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2. The Town will advise low and moderate income families of the availability of funds for home improvements from grants from local non-governmental agencies, and state and federal agencies. (Selectboard, Town Manager and Property Improvement Committee)
  3. The Town will support reasonable densities of manufactured and modular homes as a way to help fulfill the housing needs of low and moderate income families. (Planning Commission and Development Review Board)

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### **Economic Profile:**

It is a difficult time to predict what is going to happen in and to Westminster's economy. Trends that are likely to continue include small business development as home-based business or cottage industry, and some larger businesses that support local and organic agricultural production. In the absence of critical infrastructure (public water and sewer systems), the town will have difficulty attracting certain business enterprises.

The development of commercial and industrial enterprise is expected to increase in-Town employment and incomes, and might keep young adults born and schooled here to stay instead of leaving for other economic opportunities. Unsettled issues on a national level with regard to energy resources and infrastructure investment will have an impact on our economy that may not be subject to local control.

### **Business activity:**

An economic inventory in the Appendix shows that Agriculture, Forestry and supportive industries play an important role in the Westminster economy. Construction contractors and Consumer Products and Services are also significant.

The absence of a high-traffic commercial center in Westminster encourages residents to shop for goods in nearby towns, although significant tourist and local shopping does occur in the vicinity of the Interstate 91 Access Road. Major shopping destinations for Westminster residents naturally include Bellows Falls and Walpole, New Hampshire as well as more distant commercial centers. The pattern of out-of-town spending means that Westminster incomes leave the town for products that could be purchased in-town if Westminster had a shopping center. The Planning Commission has not received information suggesting that the majority of Westminster residents want a shopping center in Westminster, although some residents have expressed an interest in more local level or convenience stores. Consider the following computation: If 1,200 Westminster households spend \$200.00 a week at out-of-town supermarkets then we will export \$12 million each year ( $\$200 \times 1200 \times 50$  weeks).

### **Construction and Development Pressures:**

A table of development application types in the Appendix shows that development pressures are weak in Westminster. A high percentage of applications were for residential additions (25%) or renovations (4%) or residential accessory buildings (26%). Only 4% were for commercial projects, and 9% for new homes. This weakness in economic development is due primarily to national and statewide economic conditions of low employment and depression of the housing market. Westminster's geographical conditions may bestow upon the town a long-term destiny as primarily a rural residential setting for residents who are satisfied with the distance from commercial and industrial enterprises.

### Economic Development Policies:

1. To minimize application and development review obstacles to commercial and industrial uses that are consistent with environmental health and the protection, preservation and restoration of natural areas and wildlife resources.

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2. To promote zoning bylaws that support village and neighborhood communities that enable residents to meet their economic, social and recreational needs locally without requiring costly means of transportation.
  3. To promote zoning bylaws that minimize application and development review obstacles to home occupations, cottage industry and home-based businesses that is consistent with the protection of environmental health and public health.
  4. To welcome economic development in village districts and residential neighborhoods that maintains natural areas and rural countryside.
  5. To consider cautiously any industrial or commercial projects that present a high risk of chemical harm to the air, soil or water resources.
  6. The Planning Commission will explore the possibility of zoning bylaws that promote business development in village districts.

Economic Development Recommendations:

1. The Town will adopt, publish and enforce zoning bylaws that support the economic development policies stated here. (Planning Commission, Development Review Board and Zoning Administrator)
2. The Development Review Board will enforce the Town Zoning Bylaws through the development application and permitting process as well as by exercising the power to revoke a permit or designate an activity as a zoning violation. (Development Review Board and Zoning Administrator)
3. The Planning Commission will treat each village as having individual village planning goals based upon the conditions and development concerns that apply to that particular village. (Planning Commission)
4. The Planning Commission will support practical strategies that enable both existing and new business enterprises to have the best available technology for recycling, storing or re-using environmentally harmful materials or chemicals. (Planning Commission)
5. The Planning Commission will designate "growth center" to include the Exit 5 Access Road, the Westminster Business Park between Westminster Heights Road and Route 5, Route 5 northerly, and the Westminster Station Village District. The "growth center" will need to be precisely identified on the Proposed Land Use map, along with commercial/industrial zones. (Planning Commission)
6. The Selectboard will authorize the Planning Commission to gather information and apply for funding for a municipal water and sewer system that would be accessible for the Business Park (off Route 5) and the Town Garage. A feasibility study or engineer's report would be required before any further planning action. Experience shows that economic growth in this area and in the town as a whole is unlikely to occur without development of large or medium-scale municipal water and sewer services. (Selectboard and Planning Commission)

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## LAND USE PLAN

In order to encourage a pattern of development that conforms to the goals and policies outlined within this Plan the following general land classification system has been prepared. This system is based upon the delineation districts that are described below and depicted on the Land Use Map. Together, descriptive and mapped information constitute the Westminster Land Use Plan, and present a generalized picture of the Town as it should develop in accordance with sound planning policies.

The classification of Westminster's lands into various districts described below is consistent with the Town Plan maps that identify resources, opportunities and limitations for development. The Land Use Plan is not a regulatory device, except for its possible application to the Act 250 review process. Its implementation will require further definition, adjustment, and clarification as the town considers zoning bylaws and other means of reaching its objectives, as outlined in the various recommendations presented throughout this Plan.

The land use plan described herein is intended to maintain the historic pattern of compact village centers separated by rural countryside that has defined Westminster for centuries. Additionally, it provides for the establishment of commercial and industrial enterprises required to keep Westminster an economically vibrant community and for the protection of our natural resources. A brief explanation for the purpose of each district, policies and recommendations for development is as follows:

### **Resource Conservation District (RC)**

The resource conservation district consists of lands that are essentially undeveloped, lack direct access to arterial or collector roads, are important wildlife habitat, have high forestry value, are unsuitable for land development, or include irreplaceable, limited or significant natural, recreational, or scenic resources. The purpose of the resource district is to protect the natural resource value of lands within the district. These areas are suitable for low intensity development and should be reserved primarily for outdoor recreation, forest management, wildlife habitat, and watershed protection.

### **Rural-Residential District (RU)**

The rural-residential lands consist of those that are already committed to rural development. The physical limitations to development in these districts range from great to nonexistent. Additionally, these areas are accessible to town services and appear suitable to residential and related uses.

The purpose of the Rural Residential District is to provide for agriculture, forestry, residential and other compatible uses at low densities appropriate to the physical capability of the land and the rural character of the town. Development should not harm any irreplaceable, unique, or scarce resources or natural areas.

### **Residential District (R)**

The Residential District consists of the lands that are easily accessible to public roads and community services and which have been identified as being suitable for moderate density residential development. The purpose of the Residential District is to provide for moderate density residential development and other compatible uses. It is anticipated that the bulk of new residential growth will take place within this district. Special care should be taken to protect the rural character of this district and to locate proposed development off of productive agricultural lands as much as possible.

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### **Village District (V)**

The Village District consists of identified and potential clustered settlements. Each Village is a unique settlement dominated by established homes and interspersed with small commercial and/or community related structures. The purpose of the Village District is to support the role of the village as the focus of many social and economic activities in the community and to provide for residential, commercial, and other compatible development that serves the needs of the community. Such development should occur at moderate to high densities and include uses that will maintain the traditional economic, social and physical character of the village including its historic, agricultural, and scenic resources.

### **Commercial/Industrial District (COM/IND)**

The purpose of the combined district is to provide a centralized and accessible location for employment opportunities in manufacturing, warehousing, commercial and light industrial development. Combining these Districts enhances our “Development Growth Centers” without limiting business opportunities and needs of the town. This District will encourage orderly growth, judicious placement of parking, and avoid potential conflicts in land use.

### **Connecticut River Conservation District (CR)**

The purpose of the Connecticut River Conservation District is to recognize and designate the river corridor as a valuable floodplain with fertile agricultural soils and as an important natural, cultural, and recreational resource that is worthy of coordinated conservation efforts. It is the goal that valuable agricultural soil and natural vegetation be retained to the maximum extent possible so that the features and qualities of properties along the Connecticut River are preserved.

### **Overlay Districts**

To help identify areas that require special considerations, overlay districts and maps have been created for the following:

1. Flood Hazard Areas Overlay District
2. Historic Preservation Overlay District
3. Agricultural Land Overlay District
4. Ridgeline Protection Overlay District
5. Water Supply Source Protection.

### Land Use Policies:

1. To preserve the historic development pattern of the town of established village centers connected by rural countryside.
2. To provide for the development of diverse enterprises to satisfy and reward job opportunities and maintain high environmental standards.
3. To enhance the continuity of work and family life in an active community that holds a long-standing appreciation of our land and historical character.
4. To protect quality of life through the regulation of residential, commercial, and industrial land uses.
5. To encourage the preservation of natural, historic, recreational, and cultural resources.
6. To protect habitats of rare, threatened, endangered, and economically significant fish and wildlife.

### Land Use Recommendations:

1. The Town shall, through its planning, zoning and related decisions forward a pattern of development that preserves the traditional settlement pattern of established population centers separated by a working rural landscape. (Planning Commission, Development Review Board and Zoning Administrator)
2. The Town shall consider the capability of lands to support on-site sewage disposal and the capability of roadways to support traffic in identifying suitable densities for development.  
(Development Review Board)
3. The Town shall adopt policies to discourage residential and commercial strip development.  
(Planning Commission, Development Review Board and Zoning Administrator)

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4. The Town shall encourage clustered residential and commercial development in designated areas so as to preserve natural resources, important wildlife habitat, existing agricultural uses, and to efficiently utilize the Town's services. (Planning Commission, Zoning Administrator and Development Review Board)
  5. The Planning Commission will designate "growth center" to include the Exit 5 Access Road, the Westminster Business Park between Westminster Heights Road and Route 5, Route 5 northerly, and the Westminster Station Village District. The "growth center" will need to be precisely identified on the Proposed Land Use map, along with commercial and industrial zones. (Planning Commission)
  6. The Town shall support water and waste water feasibility studies for future economic growth. (Planning Commission and Selectboard)

## **FLOOD RESILIENCE**

Westminster has land, homes and businesses that are susceptible to the two types of flooding impacts: flooding and water inundation occurs during high water on extensive acreage along the Connecticut River. Both river erosion (when river or stream jumps its bank and rips through an area) and flooding are potential along the Connecticut River, Saxtons River and Morse Brook as well as along the streams that drain watersheds extending to our western border with Brookline and Athens.

Flooding can occur anytime of the year as a result of heavy rains, thunderstorms, tropical storms, or Nor'easters. It can result from the overflow of major rivers and their smaller tributaries, or inadequate local drainage.

Erosion is normal in Vermont due to relatively steep terrain and flashy, frequent storms. Forests have a crucial function in minimizing the impact of flooding. Treed areas absorb water, therefore decreasing the water table, and they stabilize soil, preventing erosion and increased runoff.

Some reaches of the Saxtons River have been destabilized by channeling and berming. These techniques decrease the area available for natural water storage in times of high water and often elevate the potential for erosion and flooding downstream.

In 2013, Vermont enacted Act 16 which is an act relating to municipal and regional planning and flood resilience, which requires all municipal and regional plans effective after July 1, 2014 to include a "flood resilience element" pursuant to the purpose and goals of 24 V.S.A. §4302 – Purpose: Goals – subsection (c)(14):

*(14) To encourage flood resilient communities.*

*(A) New development in identified flood hazard, fluvial erosion, and river corridor protection areas should be avoided. If new development is to be built in such areas, it should not exacerbate flooding and fluvial erosion.*

*(B) The protection and restoration of floodplains and upland forested areas that attenuate and moderate flooding and fluvial erosion should be encouraged.*

*(C) Flood emergency preparedness and response planning should be encouraged.*

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Act 16 also amended 24 V.S.A. §4382 – The plan for a municipality – adding a twelfth element to the requirements for a municipal plan, specifically to include a flood resilience plan.

(a) A plan for a municipality ..... shall include the following:

(12)

(A) A flood resilience plan that:

(i) identifies flood hazard and fluvial erosion hazard areas, based on river corridor maps provided by the Secretary of Natural Resources pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 1428(a) or maps recommended by the Secretary, and designates those areas to be protected, including floodplains, river corridors, lands adjacent to streams, wetlands, and upland forests, to reduce the risk of flood damage to infrastructure and improved property: and

(ii) recommends policies and strategies to protect the areas identified and designated under subdivision (12)(A)(i) of this subsection and to mitigate risks to public safety, critical infrastructure, historic structures, and municipal investments.

(B) A flood resilience plan may reference an existing local hazard mitigation plan approved under 44 C.F.R. § 201.6.

### **FLUVIAL EROSION**

By Statutory definition “fluvial erosion” means the erosion or scouring of riverbeds and banks during high flow conditions of a river. Most of the flooding damage experienced in Vermont is from the power of moving water and the sudden destruction of under-sized culverts and erosion of stream banks supporting roads and buildings. Providing a river the room it needs to slow the flow, over time can allow it to function as a responsive system and avoid repeated losses to public infrastructure and investments.

Erosion (and deposition) along a stream of river is natural. Sometimes, efforts to stop this process in one place can make it worse in others. Rivers, streams, and their channels are changing constantly in response to the inputs of water, energy, sediment, and debris that pass along them. Every few years a stream fills to bankfull and the shape of the channel responds to this force by cutting deeper into some streambanks and also by depositing sediments in the quiet inside bends. This process is visible as an “S” shaped form that slowly changes position.

If the stream cannot spill out of its banks, the power of the trapped water increases and the channel either digs down or cuts out further to the sides. Where roads and buildings are nearby these adjustments to the channel’s shape can become dramatic and costly.

A river is in geomorphic equilibrium when it is in balance with its water, energy, sediment, and debris. In this condition a river is neither building up sediment in the channel nor losing sediment from its bed. Importantly, a river in equilibrium has not become overly deep and can continue to overflow onto its floodplains. The water that spills onto the floodplain slows down, and the velocity of the water still in the channel does not become excessively powerful.

In trying to protect roads and buildings, we need to be sure that the river is able to function as well as possible upstream and downstream. We need functional streams and rivers with room to adjust (River Corridors) and intact floodplains to moderate the impact of high water events.

### **RIVER CORRIDORS AND FLOODPLAINS**

River Corridors and Floodplains are different but related. The River Corridor is the area that provides the physical space that the river needs to express its energy and meander without causing it to dig down. In statute it is defined as: “*River Corridor*” means the land area adjacent to a river that is required to accommodate the dimensions, slope, planform, and buffer of the naturally stable channel and that is necessary for the natural maintenance or natural restoration of a dynamic equilibrium condition and for minimization of fluvial erosion hazards, as delineated by the Agency of Natural Resources in accordance with river corridor protection procedures.

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A “Floodplain” is the area where water flowing out over a river bank can spread out and slow down.

River Corridors and Floodplains overlap a great deal. One on top of the other there might be 60 – 90% overlap. However, there are areas in the River Corridor that will be eventually shaped by the channel – although they may be currently high and dry – and other areas in the floodplain that will be under water during a large flood, but which the river channel may not need to access to maintain its geomorphic equilibrium.

The extent of a River Corridor is based on calculations including such things as the meander belt of the stream, soils, watershed size and gradient, and channel width. The extent of floodplains is based on calculations such as stream peak flow history and frequency.

## **REGULATORY FLOOD HAZARD AREAS**

There are two types of regulatory flood hazard areas and two sets of official maps that identify and designate those flood hazard areas in Vermont: inundation hazard areas are designated by Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMS), and fluvial erosion hazard areas are designated on the VT Agency of Natural Resource’s River Corridor maps.

### Inundation Hazard

Towns participating in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) must regulate development in areas designated on the FIRMS that show the floodplain that FEMA has calculated would be covered by water in a 1% chance annual inundation event, also referred to as the “100 year flood” or base flood. This area of inundation is called the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA). FIRMS may also show expected base flood elevations (BFEs) and floodways (smaller areas that carry more current). FIRMS are only prepared for larger streams and rivers. The Town of Westminster has areas of flood risk mapped by FEMA.

### Fluvial Erosion Hazard

A significant portion of flood damage in Vermont occurs outside of the FEMA mapped areas along smaller upland streams, as well as along road drainage systems that fail to convey the amount of water they are receiving. Since FEMA maps are only concerned with inundation, and these other areas are at risk from flash flooding and fluvial erosion, these areas are often not recognized as being flood-prone. Property owners in such areas outside of SFHAs are not required to have flood insurance. Flash flooding in these reaches can be extremely erosive, causing damage to road infrastructure and to topographic features including stream beds and the sides of hills and mountains, and also creating landslide risk.

Vermont ANR’s river corridor maps show the area needed to address the fluvial erosion hazards, which may be inside of FEMA-mapped areas, but often extend outside of those areas. River corridor maps delineate areas where the lateral movement of the river and the associated erosion may be more of the threat than inundation by floodwaters. Elevation or flood proofing alone may not be protective of structures in these areas, as erosion can undermine structures. ANR released statewide river corridor maps in the latter part of 2014. The Town of Westminster has areas of River Corridor mapped by ANR.

## **ADDRESSING FLOOD RESILIENCE**

This plan identifies as flood hazard areas the Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHAs) shown on the NFIP, FIRMS, and identifies fluvial erosion hazard areas as those shown on the ANR River Corridor maps. Further, this Plan designates both those areas as areas to be protected, including the floodplains, the river corridors, and lands adjacent to streams, wetlands, and upland forests, to reduce the risk of flood damage to infrastructure and improved property. In addition, this plan incorporates by reference the Town’s Local Hazard Mitigation Plan approved under 44 C.F.R. § 201.6. Finally, this Plan recommends the following policies and strategies to protect those areas to mitigate risks to public safety, critical infrastructure, historic structures, and municipal investments.

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### Flood Resilience Policies:

1. It is the policy of the Town to foster the protection and restoration of river corridors, floodplains, wetlands, and upland forested areas that attenuate and moderate flooding and fluvial erosion.
2. It is the policy of the Town to protect floodplains, river corridors, lands adjacent to streams, wetlands, and upland forests through adoption and administration of flood hazard area regulations governing development in designated Special Flood Hazard Areas and River Corridors, in order to reduce the risk of flood damage to infrastructure, improved property, people, and the environment.
3. New development in identified flood hazard, fluvial erosion, and river corridor protection areas should be avoided. If new development is to be built in such areas, it should not exacerbate flooding and fluvial erosion.
4. The protection and restoration of floodplains and upland forested areas that attenuate and moderate flooding and fluvial erosion should be encouraged.
5. Flood emergency preparedness and response planning are encouraged.

### Flood Resilience Recommendations:

1. The Town will be familiar with Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) that delineate areas that could be covered on inundated by water during flooding. (Selectboard, Development Review Board, Zoning Administrator)
2. The Town will be familiar with up-to-date ANR river corridor maps that delineate the land area adjacent to streams and rivers that are required to accommodate a stable channel. (Selectboard, Development Review Board, Zoning Administrator)
3. The Town will pursue a flood resilience management approach whose essential components are to identify and map flood hazard areas, fluvial erosion hazard areas, and river corridor protection areas based on stream geomorphic assessment studies and maps provided by the Vermont ANR Rivers Program, and designate those areas for protection to reduce the risk of flood damage to infrastructure and private property.
4. The Town will update the Flood Hazard Areas Overlay District to include regulation of river corridors, and include provisions for advance notification of and specific limits on new development activities in identified flood hazard areas, fluvial erosion areas, and/or River Corridors, based on regulatory templates developed by the ANR DEC Rivers Program.
5. The Town will regulate any new development in identified flood hazard areas, fluvial erosion hazard areas, and/or River Corridor to ensure that development does not exacerbate flooding and fluvial erosion, and extend these provisions to development activities that might increase the amount and/or rate of runoff and soil erosion from upland areas.

Additional information is available at <http://floodready.vermont.gov/>.

## **COMPATIBILITY WITH PLANS OF ADJACENT TOWNS**

Westminster shares boundaries with the Towns of Athens, Brookline, Putney and Rockingham. Westminster relies on these and other towns in the Windham Region for many of the services required by its residents. The adjacent Towns of Putney and Rockingham, largely in its villages of Bellows Falls and Saxtons River, provide the retail businesses. Another area of interconnectedness is education, as Westminster, Rockingham and Athens share a regional high school located in Westminster.

Most land uses in Westminster and the rest of these towns have been largely the product of the towns' histories and early economic development. This historic compatibility of uses had induced a compatibility of Town plans as the following will demonstrate.

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ATHENS. Westminster shares its northwestern border with the Town of Athens, which has no Town Plan.

BROOKLINE. Westminster shares its southwestern border with the Town of Brookline. The Town defines its land use plan as "intended to protect Brookline's rural character that has defined the Town for centuries. Additionally, it provides for the protection of the natural resources and scenic areas..."

PUTNEY. Westminster shares its southern boundary with the Town of Putney. Putney has most in common with Westminster as it is also located in the Connecticut River Valley and is linked by Interstate 91, Route 5 and the railroad. The towns share similar land use patterns and plans and possess some of the most significant agricultural land in the Windham Region.

ROCKINGHAM. Westminster shares its northern boundary with the Town of Rockingham. The Rockingham Town Plan recognizes its close ties with Westminster as follows: "Portions of Westminster are closely tied with Rockingham, particularly Bellows Falls. This includes the industrial area on Granger St, the Kissell Hill area, the south end of Westminster Terrace and the North Westminster/Gageville area. These areas are located in the northeast section of the town and are not the more rural areas found in the rest of Westminster".

### **COMPATIBILITY WITH THE WINDHAM REGIONAL PLAN**

The Windham Regional Plan adopted September 30, 2014 contains proposed regional land use. The largest areas of Westminster as shown on the Proposed Land Use map of the Regional Plan comprise "Productive Rural" described as "low density and very low density residential areas containing land-based resources that, when in productive use, contribute to the region's working landscape and have significant economic value"; and "Resource" described as lands that "require special protection or consideration due to their uniqueness, irreplaceable or fragile nature, or important ecological function." The zoning districts in Westminster describe areas generally compatible with those descriptions.

### **PROGRAM FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TOWN PLAN**

The Westminster Town Plan sets forth the vision for the future of our town. The goals and policies stated herein provide the framework for managing Westminster's growth. To achieve these goals and policies, recommendations have been set forth in each of the program element areas. The implementation of the recommendations set forth in this Plan is a local responsibility, but must be accomplished within the environment established by regional and state planning agencies, state statutes and federal laws.

The recommendations set forth in the Plan reflect this interdependency of the Town, the Westminster School District, Westminster Fire District #3, the Village of Westminster, the Village of North Westminster, Westminster Fire District #2, the Windham Regional Commission, the State of Vermont, Westminster Cares, Southern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA), the Westminster Recreation Club and other local private and non-profit organizations that serve the citizens of Westminster, and local volunteers.

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**Monitoring of timely implementation:**

A) Each recommendation is expected to be implemented in a timely manner by the officers and agencies listed in parentheses following the recommendation. Most recommendations are already being implemented by necessity and/or as the ongoing application of a Town Plan policy. Some long-term projects may require a special temporary committee to study the obstacles to implementation, funding issues, and a strategy of steps to accomplish implementation according to a realistic timetable.

The Westminster Planning Commission does not currently endeavor to provide realistic timetables for long-term projects except upon direction from the Selectboard and the participation of a panel of committed residents.

B) The Planning Commission will examine three or four plan elements each year and submit a written report, preferably in September, indicating the recommendations that are being implemented satisfactorily, those recommendations that need attention or warrant revision in order to be more realistic, and any recommendations that are not being implemented and warrant guidance from the Selectboard as to what action should be taken.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Development Applications most recent three years

Type	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	Type total	Percent
Addition	6	12	12	30	25%
Boundary Line	3	1	2	6	5%
Commercial		4	1	5	4%
Demolish	2			2	2%
Home Bus/Cot		2	3	5	4%
Industrial	1			1	1%
Major Subdivision	1	1	1	3	2%
Minor Subdivision			1	1	1%
Move/use		4		4	3%
New Home	3	7	1	11	9%
New Res Building	19	7	5	31	26%
Pool	1	1		2	2%
PUD		1		1	1%
Renovate	4	1		5	4%
Replace		1	1	2	2%
Sign	1			1	1%
Temporary Building	1			1	1%
Two lots/one	3	4	3	10	8%
				0	
Totals:	45	46	30	121	

New Residential Building includes garage, shed or barn for any accessory building for residential use. For real estate activity see Housing element. There are currently many houses for sale in Westminster with little new house construction. Sellers could be planning to rent or replace the house when sold.

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## **Appendix B:** Inventory of businesses operating in Westminster, 2013

An inventory of economic resources in the Town of Westminster, adapted from the Westminster Tax List and Manta online business list. This information was not verified by direct contact with business owners. About 220 businesses are listed. This economic report can be improved by verification of business status and category, and information about property space occupied by the business or available for business use. The Planning Commission welcomes corrections by business owners or managers.

Agriculture & Forestry (41)  
Apparel (1)  
Associations/Non-Profits (7)  
Automotive Services (10)  
Building & Construction (21)  
Consumer Electronics & Appliances (1)  
Consumer Services (3)  
Defense (1)  
Educational Services (6)  
Electrical (4)  
Fabrication (2)  
Financial (2)  
Government (12)  
Healthcare (6)  
Insurance (1)  
Legal (2)  
Materials & Chemicals (2)  
Media (1)  
Non-classifiable establishments (1)  
Other Business Services (13)  
Other Consumer Products/Services (23)  
Professional Services (5)  
Real Estate, consulting (17)  
Restaurants & Bars (3)  
Shopping & Stores (8)  
Travel & Leisure (8)  
Trucking Companies (8)  
Warehousing & Storage (3)

### **Agriculture and Forestry:**

All Seasons Tree Service, Wellington Road – ornamental shrub and tree services  
Alpen Glo Farm, North Westminster  
Frank Arena – livestock  
BART Industries, Vermont Apple, US Route 5  
Basin Farm, Basin Farm Road  
Bazin Farm, US Route 5 – general farms, primarily crop  
Botanica Santera – landscape counseling and planning  
Broken Axe Logging, Deer Run  
Brookside Timber Harvesting, Parker Road  
East Run Farm, Bump Road  
Harlow Farm – The Last Stand, US Route 5 – vegetables and melons, organic products  
Hayward Garden Design, McKinnon Road  
Hidden Springs Maple, Bemis Hill Road  
High Meadows Organic Farm, Westminster West Road  
Holton Farms Produce, US Route 5 – general farms, primarily crop

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**Agriculture and Forestry (continued):**

Joel Holton, US Route 5 – vegetables and melons  
Jubilee Farm, Back Westminster Road – general farms, primarily crop  
Major Maple, Barnes Road  
McCaffrey’s Logging, Milky Way  
Meadowhill Farms, Hartley Hill Road  
Muddy Paws Canine Center, US Route 5, animal care services, not veterinary  
Northeast Land Works, US Route 5  
Orchard House, LLC, US Route 5  
Organic Solutions, Old Coddling Road  
Parish Hill Cheese, Patch Road  
Putney Brook Farm, Old Coddling Road  
Rainbows End, Access Road – ornamental floriculture, nursery products  
Rice Tree Service, US Route 5 – ornamental shrub and tree services  
Sidelands Vermont Maple Products, Burnett Road  
Stockers Landscaping, Back Westminster Road – landscape counseling, planning  
Sweet Maple Alpacas, River Road  
Triple B Lawn Service, Windmill Hill South – lawn and garden services  
Vermont Hillside Lawn Services Inc. – lawn and garden services  
Vermont Shepherd Cheese, Patch Farm Road  
Westminster Animal Hospital, US Route 5  
Westminster Dairy 2, Westminster West Road  
Westminster Meats, Seafood Lane  
Westminster Organics, LLC US Route 5 - vegetables and melons, organic products  
White Tail Sugaring, Kurn Hattin Road  
Windham Growers, Kurn Hattin Road – lawn and garden services  
Windmill Hill Farm Co-op, Holden Road

**Apparel:**

By A Thread, Sabin Avenue – piece goods, notions, other dry goods

**Associations/Non-Profits:**

Christian Family Circle Church, Back Westminster Road – religious organizations  
Congregational Church of Westminster West  
First Congregational Church, Main Street – religious organizations  
Jehovah’s Witnesses, Orchard Hill Road – religious organizations  
SEVCA, Buck Drive – individual and family social services  
VFW Post – civic, social and fraternal associations  
Westminster Cares, US Route 5 – individual and family social services

**Automotive Services:**

Dennis’s Auto Body, Saxtons River Road – body, upholstery, paint repairs  
Durand Automotive Inc., US Route 5 – Toyota, Ford cars and trucks, used cars and repairs  
John’s Car Corner, US Route 5 – general automotive repair shops  
J & W Auto Repair, US Route 5 – general automotive repair shops  
K & K Cycle, Birchview Extension – motorcycle dealers  
L & B Freightliner Inc., US Route 5 – general automotive/truck repair shops  
L & R Auto Service, Route 121 – general automotive repair shops  
M & M Sports, US Route 5 – automotive dealers  
Sports Car Services, Beebe Road  
Westminster Auto Service, US Route 5 – used vehicles, repairs

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**Building & Construction:**

2 State Pools, Valley Brook Drive – special trade contractors  
Adams Trucking & Excavation, LLC, Westminster Heights Road – excavation  
Bazin Brothers - Excavation  
Catamount Painting, Back Westminster Road – painting and paper hanging  
Charles Lovell General Contracting, Parker Road – excavation work  
Clark’s Heavy Equipment, Route 121  
Daniels Well Tech, US Route 5 – water well drilling  
Emtri General Contractors, Inc., Alden Street – general contractors, houses  
Hodgkins & Sons, Inc. - Excavation  
Jonathan Jesup Restorations, Goddard Hill Road – general contractors, houses  
Lay-Rite Carpet Service, Westminster Heights Road – laying floors  
Pine Line Construction, Goldies Road – general contractors, houses  
R B Cook Construction Co. Inc., Maple Ridge – special trade contractors  
Sam Streeter LLC – general contractors, houses  
Sand Hill Builders, US Route 5 – general contractor, houses  
S L Moore Construction, Route 121  
Savoy Engineering, Pine Banks Road  
Stetson & Son Roofing, Shady Pines Park – roofing  
Vermont Custom Wood Products, US Route 5 – kitchen cabinets  
Wells and Company Builders, North Goddard Hill Road  
Woodstone Co., Patch Road – millwork

**Consumer Electronics & Appliances:**

Stamp Package PC – Shady Pines Park – miscellaneous nondurable goods

**Consumer Services:**

Anton Semenov’s Music Service – repair shop  
Headstart Early Education Service, Buck Drive – child day care services  
Learning Foundations VT – Dorsch Hill – child day care services

**Defense:**

Vermont Army National Guard, Armory Lane – national security

**Educational Services:**

Butterfield Library, US Route 5 – libraries  
Compass School, US Route 5 – elementary and secondary schools  
New England Kurn Hattin Homes, Mathey Road – boarding school  
Westminster Center School, School Street – elementary school  
Westminster West Public Library - libraries  
Westminster West School, Westminster West Road

**Electrical:**

Dibernardo Electrical Contracting, Route 121  
Interstate Electrical Services, US Route 5 – electrical work  
Lawrence Electric, River Road  
Precourt’s Electric, Goddard Road – electrical work

**Fabrication:**

Fall Mountain Motors, US Route 5 – electrical apparatus, wiring, construction  
TP Equipment Leasing LLC US Route 5 commercial equipment

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**Financial:**

Manhattan Mortgage Co., - mortgage bankers and loans  
Southeastern Vermont Community, Buck Drive – mortgage bankers and loans

**Government:**

Recruiting and Retention – legislative bodies  
Town Clerk, US Route 5 – executive offices  
Town Garage, Town Garage Road – legislative bodies, road maintenance  
Town Manager, US Route 5 – executive offices  
Town of Westminster, US Route 5 – executive, legislative offices  
Town Treasurer US Route 5 – public finance and taxation  
US Post Office, US Route 5 – United States Postal Service  
US Post Office (2), US Route 5, Westminster Station – US Postal Service  
Westminster Fire District 3, Grout Avenue – fire protection  
Westminster Town Listers, US Route 5 – legislative bodies  
Westminster Zoning Office, US Route 5 – executive offices  
Windham County Sheriff Department, Route 121 – police protection

**Healthcare:**

George Luhrmann MD PA, US Route 5 – doctor of medicine  
Hallowell, Thayer Road – nursing and personal care facilities  
Kelter, Ronald, US Route 5 – health practitioners  
Ralph Buck DMD, US Route 5 – dentists  
Sojourns Community Health Clinic, US Route 5 – doctors, chiropractic and health practitioners  
Temple Chiropractic, Route 121

**Insurance:**

Greater Falls Insurance, US Route 5 – insurance agents, service

**Legal:**

Alex Lyon & Sons, Westminster Heights Road – legal services  
Law Offices of Dan M. Davis, Monroe Street – legal services

**Materials & Chemicals:**

Con-O-Lite of Vermont Inc., Goldies Road – cut stone and stone products  
Mostly Micros, Rathbun Road – minerals and earths, ground or treated

**Media:**

I O I Film Productions, Co, Villers Road – allied to motion picture production

**Non-Classifiable Establishments:**

Skeele-Quest A & M, West Road

**Other Business Services:**

Architectual CADD Design, Back Westminster Road – business services  
Ballard, William Piano Service, East Mountain Road – musical instrument service  
Bazin Acres LLC, Sabin Avenue – business services  
Cable Connection, Route 123  
Charles Trevorow, Davidson Hill Road – business services  
Chimney Doctor, Earth Bridge Road – cleaning and maintenance services  
Daniel M Scott, Back Westminster Road – business services  
HV Westminster, Westminster Housing – business services  
LOC Bluecanoe, US Route 5 – business services

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**Other Business Services (continued):**

Mr. G's Liquidation Center, US Route 5 – business services  
Robert Bennett, Back Westminster Road – business services  
Robert David Bursky, Back Westminster Road – business services  
Stephen J Angers, Elite Image, Back Westminster Road – business services

**Other Consumer Products & Services:**

Abenaque Car Wash, Abenaque Drive  
Beebe's Plumbing and Heating, Route 121  
Champagne Enterprises, US Route 5 (doll makers)  
Connecticut Valley Aquasport, Streeter Road  
Cooperman Fife and Drum, Route 121  
David Deen Associates, Westminster West Road  
Eternal Flame Crematorium, US Route 5 – funeral services and crematories  
Fire Circle Studio, Windmill Hill Road  
Floyd's Plumbing & Heating, Kurn Hattin Road – plumbing and heating, air conditioning  
Green Mountain Gazebo, Kimball Hill North  
Green Mountain Power, Westminster Heights Road  
Harrington Plumbing & Heating, Camp Road – plumbing and heating, air conditioning  
Ida's Stairway Beauty Salon, Grant Street  
J. Gould Plumbing and Heating, Paper Mill Road  
James Plumbing & Heating Oil, Paper Mill Road – plumbing and heating, air conditioning  
John T's Appliance Repair, US Route 5  
Perfect Creations, Route 123  
P R Painting, Basin Farm Road  
Uncle Joe's Pools, Valley Brook Road  
Vermont Casket Company, Buck Drive – burial caskets  
Watch and Clock Makers, Gage Street  
Westminster Driving School, Burnett Road  
Westminster Vermont Confections, Grout Avenue

**Professional Services:**

Consensus Consulting, Davidson Hill Road – business consulting services  
Golden Cross Ambulance, US Route 5 – local passenger, medical need  
Latham Bookkeeping, Patch Road  
Long View Forest Management, Inc., Picz Road – management services  
Sunnie E Donath, Kimball Hill North – secretarial and court reporting services

**Real Estate, investments, business consulting:**

Arms Real Estate – real estate agents and managers  
100 Acre Consulting, Westminster West Road  
4 D Corporation, Church Avenue  
Catalyst Financial Group, Quarry Road  
Cobalt Properties, US Route 5  
East Coast Consulting, Route 121  
Gage House Realty, Gage Street  
Goodell Group LLC, Route 121  
Greener Pastures Realty, Pine Banks Road  
Jackie Atwood Real Estate, Newcomb Brook Road  
Kimball Hill Properties, Hickory Ridge Road  
Martocci and Henry Real Estate, Buck Drive  
Stiles Lake Investments, Potter Industrial Drive  
Thomas Spencer Property Damage, Cold Spring Hill

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**Real Estate, investments, business consulting (continued):**

Time Management Consultants, Kurn Hattin Road  
Twin State Management, Gordon Heights  
Windmill Hill Properties, West Road

**Restaurants & Bars:**

Allen Brothers, US Route 5 – convenience store and self-serve  
Café Loco, US Route 5 – breakfast and lunch  
Father's Restaurant, US Route 5 – breakfast, lunch, dinner

**Shopping & Stores:**

Allen Brothers Farm Market, US Route 5 – fresh fruits and vegetables  
Big Red Barn, US Route 5 – food gifts, specialties, ice cream  
Community Feed Store, Route 123  
Dragonfly Dry Goods, US Route 5  
Irving Oil Corporation, US Route 5  
Larson's Clock Shop, Main Street – jewelry stores  
Quilt Away Fabrics, Back Westminster Road – sewing, needlework, piece goods  
Westminster Station Market, US Route 5

**Travel & Leisure:**

Arvanitis, 3 Chimney B & B  
Blue Haven Bed and Breakfast, US Route 5  
Putney Student Travel, Hickory Ridge Road  
Le Studio-Gymnastics and Dance, US Route 5 – amusement and recreation  
Raney Crawford B & B, Westminster West Road  
Roy L Family Snow Travelers, Inc., Bald Hill Road – travel agencies  
Westminster Historical Society, Main Street – museums and art galleries  
Westminster Motel, Main Street – hotels and motels

**Trucking Companies:**

BDR Transport Inc., US Route 5 – long-haul trucking  
CCT, US Route 5 – long haul trucking  
Con-Way Freight, Potter Industrial Drive – long haul trucking  
GI Cobb Transport, US Route 5 – transportation services  
GMH Transportation Services, US Route 5 – refrigerated trucking, long haul  
L & B North, US Route 5 – local trucking without storage  
Triumvirate Environmental Inc, US Route 5 – local trucking without storage  
Windshire Trucking, Birchview Heights – livestock hauling

**Warehousing & Storage:**

Burtco Self Storage, Bridge Street – general storage  
Casey Storage Solutions, Potter Industrial Drive – general warehousing, storage  
Westminster Mini Storage, US Route 5 – general storage

## Appendix C: Household Income and Employment

Income and Employment Profile from the 2010 U. S. Census and projections:  
(Data included may be for a CDP – Census Designated Place)

Employment Data from 2001	to 2011	Change over this period: *	
Employers:	1,948	1,930	- 0.01%
Employed:	23,421	21,812	- 6.9%

Employment in:	Change over this period:		
Goods Producing	4,154	3,484	- 16.1%
Service Providing	16,599	15,347	- 7.5%
Government	2,668	2,981	+ 11.7%

\*Employment Data is for Windham County, from Vermont Department of Labor

Employment increased significantly (10% - 20%) in real estate and renovations, education and health, health care and social services, government. Employment decreased significantly (10% - 33%) in manufacturing, durable goods and non-durable goods, wholesale trade, information services, finance and insurance. Agricultural and forestry employment data is not included here.

### Median Household Income 1979 to 2009:

Town	\$14,240	\$53,103	
County	\$13,696	\$63,277	Westminster Village 2009
State	\$14,790	\$51,555	\$91,023

### Median Family Income 1979 to 2009:

Town	\$16,473	\$60,188	
County	\$16,526	\$58,504	Westminster Village 2009
State	\$17,205	\$63,483	\$91,477

### Per Capita Income 1979 to 2009:

Town	\$5,702	\$24,920	
County	\$7,188	\$27,661	Westminster Village 2009
State	\$6,178	\$26,940	\$32,183

### Poverty Status 1979 to 2009:

Westminster	346	319
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### Per Cent of Individuals Below Poverty Status:

	<u>1990</u>	<u>2009</u>
Town	10%	9.9%
County	9.4%	10.6%
State	9.4%	11.4%

### Food Stamp Benefits 2001-2010:

	<u>2001</u>	<u>02</u>	<u>03</u>	<u>04</u>	<u>05</u>	<u>2010</u>
Westminster	69	71	69	74	80	142

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# Town Plan Maps