

2009 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Community Character & Design

2009

CITY OF WESTMINSTER

What is the Community Character & Design Element?

During its 1997 session, the General Assembly passed five pieces of legislation and budget initiatives known collectively as "Smart Growth." Maryland has adopted the principles of Smart Growth to be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan.

The following Smart Growth principle relates to the Community Character & Design Element:

Principle: Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place

- To craft a vision and set standards for development and construction which respond to community values of architectural beauty and distinctiveness,
- To create interesting, unique communities which reflect the values and cultures of the people who reside there,
- To foster the types of physical environments which support a more cohesive community fabric
- To construct and preserve buildings which prove to be assets to a community because of the unique contribution to the look and feel of a city

Community Vision for Community Character

Residents describe the small town charm of Westminster as an attraction for both future residents and visitors. Residents express a desire to maintain the friendly, open and inviting atmosphere of Westminster and to expand upon it in order to make it one of the City’s greatest assets.

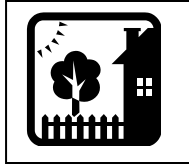
There is a need for residents to take pride in their community from such gestures as maintaining the appearance of their homes to being respectful to their neighbors. One neighbor should not be overlooked. That is ‘McDaniel College’. Some residents suggest developing a working relationship with McDaniel College to take advantage of the opportunities available, such as the “Theatre on the Hill” or professors and students patronizing Downtown businesses. The image of a welcoming, small college town could become the centerpiece of creating a tourist attraction here in Westminster that residents requested to see in the future.

State Planning Vision found in this Element

Community Design - Compact, mixed-use, walkable design consistent with existing community character and located near transit options. Ensure efficient preservation and enhancement of natural systems, open spaces, recreational areas, and historical, cultural, and archeological resources.

Issues & Opportunities

- Community Character
- Compatible Design
- Image & Identity of Westminster
- Historic Preservation



Part 1: Community Character & Design

The 2009 Comprehensive Plan recognizes the importance of a positive community image and quality community design to assist the City in instilling a sense of pride and well-being in the community, assuring quality employment, and improving tourism. A quality built environment contributes to the overall economic, environmental, and social well-being of Westminster.

The Community Character and Design Element is a combination of the preservation of the physical setting and the historic character of the City. The City recognizes the importance of protecting Westminster's natural and built environments. Balancing development and environmental values is necessary to maintain Westminster's quality of life and community livability into the future. Livable and sustainable developments promote long-range strategies that bring together environmental, economic, and social values.

Section 1: Community Design

Community design is more than landscaping, building design, and parks. It involves the city's physical layout, the natural setting, and the visual relationships among the individual features that make up the community. Good community design results in a town that functions well, has a pleasant environment, and has visual identity. As the Westminster region's population grows, local community design issues will continue to be of major importance in order to preserve the identity of the City. New development will be integrated with the natural and built environments. For example, flexible design options, such as clustered development, will maximize opportunities for retention of open space and vegetation.

The appearance of a city reflects a great deal about the community and the people who live in it; whether or not the community is perceived as a progressive and active environment, and thus appearance plays a strong role in the economics of the area. A city that is well planned and attractive will draw shoppers, visitors, businesses, and residents.

Section 2: Community Character

Westminster's identity is based on a rich heritage and cultural diversity. The 2009 Comprehensive Plan promotes a community awareness of the importance of a positive image for Westminster for attracting new employment and increasing tourism. In addition, a positive identity will instill a sense of pride and well-being for current residents and emphasize an attractive community appearance. The small town

CHAPTER 8

Part 1: Community Character & Design

Part 2: Built Environment

Part 3: Vision for Future Development

Part 4: Westminster Historic Preservation

Part 5: Historic Preservation Programs

Part 6: Historic Preservation Partners

Part 6: Protection of Historic Resources

Goals and Objectives

character and historic charm of the City is found in Westminster's historic buildings, neighborhoods and streetscapes. In order to protect Westminster's quality of life, community character and city identity, efforts need to be taken preserve the historical, cultural and natural resources of Westminster.

Part 2: Built Environment

Section 1: Types of Development

Two general types of development characterize the City of Westminster. In the older parts of the City, development is denser, offering a mixture of residential, commercial, and civic uses. On the outskirts of the City, development is less dense and is typified by the segregation of land uses characteristic of suburban communities, so that residential and commercial uses are geographically separated.

Section 2: Street Patterns

The streets in the older part of Westminster generally follow a traditional grid pattern with a combination of primary streets and secondary service alleys. Buildings have been constructed close together and at the edge of the sidewalk, particularly in the downtown business district of Westminster. This arrangement encourages pedestrian activity because businesses are easily reached by walking, and the narrow appearance of the streetscape encourages vehicles to travel more slowly.

Section 3: Neighborhood Design

Within the residential neighborhoods that border the historic core, more space has been provided between individual buildings. These older suburban neighborhoods fit in well with the historic fabric of the downtown because in most cases, these areas feature small front yards, narrow streets, sidewalks, and service alleys. Many of these residential neighborhoods are within walking distance to the retail shops and services available in Downtown Westminster. Some of these neighborhoods have gained historic value in their own right as examples of early suburban development patterns and their adaptation to local vernacular influences.

Section 4: Architecture Styles

Architecture in Westminster often reflects a combination of vernacular and national styles. In many cases, the form of a building is based on the vernacular farmhouse with detailing that represents certain elements of high style architecture. At times, a well-to-do farmer would construct very similar houses on both his agricultural land and in town. Particularly in the oldest parts of Westminster, there was a considerable time lag between styles that were popular nationally and the styles being constructed locally.

Part 3: Vision for Future Development

Introduction

One of the core principles of Smart Growth is the creation or preservation of a "sense of place." A "sense of place" results when design and development are able to protect and incorporate the distinctive character of the particular place in which it is located. Geography, natural features, climate, culture, historical resources, and ecology each contribute to the distinctive character of a region. The City of Westminster has adopted this principle as the City's vision that future development will preserve the image and identity of the community. The following community design concepts will serve as a guide to City staff, residents and developers on how Westminster will implement this vision and promote a "sense of place."

The Westminster Planning, Zoning and Development Staff will review all future development plans for the following community design concepts to meet the goals and objectives of this Element:

Section 1: Community Character

The most recognizable aspect of community character is the physical appearance of buildings and their relationship to each other and to the streets. Many components compromise community character, including:

- Road network
- Land use
- Building orientation
- Setbacks
- Lot sizes and shapes
- Façade widths
- Distances between buildings
- Roof shapes and pitches
- Colors and texture
- Lot widths and depths
- Porches
- Building heights
- Building materials
- Doors and window arrangement

Section 2: Traditional Neighborhood Design

Traditional Neighborhood Design (or Traditional Neighborhood Development) creates village-like neighborhoods with housing for diverse populations, a mix of nonresidential land uses, walkable streets, public space, integrated civic uses and commercial centers and accessible open space. Traditional neighborhoods are compact communities that provide destinations that are close to home and work, with sidewalk and trail environments for walking and biking. Elements of Traditional Neighborhood Design include:

- Limited size
- Mixed uses
- Street network
- Sidewalks and pedestrian paths
- Public square or center
- Porches
- Open space
- Shallow setbacks
- Edges and gateways
- Compatible building types

Section 3: Urban Design

Westminster promotes quality urban design. Urban design is the process of giving form, shape and character to the arrangement of various parts of the urban environment: from buildings to whole neighborhoods, with an emphasis on compact mixed-use development with good pedestrian and public transportation access. Urban design blends architecture, landscaping and city planning concepts together to make an urban area accessible, attractive and functional.

Section 4: Pedestrian-Oriented Design

Westminster encourages the use of pedestrian-oriented design. Pedestrian-oriented design describes land use activities that are designed and arranged in a way that emphasizes travel by foot rather than by car. Elements include compact, mixed-use development patterns with facilities and design that enhance the environment for pedestrians in terms of safety, walking distances, comfort and the visual appeal of the surroundings. Pedestrian-friendly environments can be created by locating buildings close to the sidewalk, by lining the street with trees, and by buffering the sidewalk with planting strips or parked cars, small shops, street-level lighting or signs, and public art or displays.

Section 5: Principles of Public Places & Spaces

Project for Public Spaces (PPS) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping people create and sustain public spaces that build stronger communities. Today, PPS has become an internationally recognized center for best-practices, information, and resources about “Placemaking.” PPS developed a set of principles for “What Makes a Successful Place?” In evaluating thousands of public spaces around the world, PPS has found that successful ones have four key qualities: they are accessible; people are engaged in activities there; the space is comfortable and has a good image; and finally, it is a sociable place: one where people meet each other and take people when they come to visit.

Quality 1: Access & Linkages

A visitor can judge the accessibility of a place by its connections to its surroundings, both visual and physical. A successful public space is easy to get to and get through; it is visible both from a distance and up close. The edges of a space are important as well: for instance, a row of shops along a street is more interesting and generally safer to walk by than a blank wall or empty lot.

Quality 2: Comfort & Image

Whether a space is comfortable and presents itself well - has a good image - is key to its success. Comfort includes perceptions about safety, cleanliness, and the availability of places to sit - the importance of giving people the choice to sit where they want is generally underestimated.

Quality 3: Uses & Activities

Activities are the basic building blocks of a place. Having something to do gives people a reason to come to a place - and return. When there is nothing to do, a space will be empty and that

generally means that something is wrong. The more activities that are going on and that people have an opportunity to participate in, the better. Cities should create places where people of different ages can use the space so that the space is used throughout the day.

Quality 4: Sociability

This is a difficult quality for a place to achieve, but once attained it becomes an unmistakable feature. When people see friends, meet and greet their neighbors, and feel comfortable interacting with strangers, they tend to feel a stronger sense of place or attachment to their community - and to the place that fosters these types of social activities.

Section 6: Character & Design Compatible with the Region

The City of Westminster has been working with the Carroll County Planning Staff to coordinate implementing the “Carroll County Design Expectations,” which serve as a manual to educate the public on the County’s expectations for new development architecture and design. The Carroll County Planning Staff have a similar vision as the City Planning Staff to preserve the historic character of the region. The 2010 Carroll County Comprehensive Plan Draft developed the following goals under the County Community Design Element and will be used as a reference for the City of Westminster until the City completes the “Westminster Design Guidelines and Manual.”

Carroll County Community Design Element

1. Incorporate standards that promote a traditional layout and design for new communities and neighborhoods
2. Create walkability in new and existing communities
3. Protect visual resources to ensure that Carroll County’s traditional landscape remains a valuable civic and economic resource
4. Expand the opportunities for residents in urban and suburban areas of the county to participate in agricultural activities and/or create their own garden plots
5. Minimize the visual, environmental, and economic impacts of parking facilities
6. Develop design standards and/or guidelines to apply to different types and locations of development to ensure a minimum level of quality design is achieved
7. Recognize, utilize, and preserve our community heritage resources that express the character and form of our existing communities as a touchstone to help guide and shape our future communities
8. Cluster development into new rural hamlets in areas designated for protection as an agricultural resource
9. Establish a set of minimum standards that are shared by the County and towns and implement those items uniformly across jurisdictional boundaries
10. Mitigate the streetscape and traffic impacts of current and future commercial strip corridors

Part 4: Westminster Historic Preservation

Section 1: National Register District

The Westminster National Register District, created in 1980, encompasses much of the older part of town and includes buildings that were constructed from the late 1700s and onward. The oldest structures in Westminster are generally located in the eastern portion of the City, where the original land parcels were platted. The town gradually expanded westward along the present day Main Street, with latter residential neighborhoods built on the outskirts. Over time, many of the older neighborhoods have experienced new construction on infill parcels that is not always compatible with the historic character of the town.

According to the inventory form completed for nomination to the National Register, at least 89% of the structures located within the Westminster National Register District were considered to be historically contributing to the District in 1980. This percentage has likely decreased due to alterations and demolitions in the 25 years since the establishment of the District. A resurvey of the District would provide an accurate assessment of the current condition of the City's National Register District. The Historic District Commission (HDC) has made resurveying the 1980 National Register District its priority project in order to add structures that have acquired historic significance since 1980 and to include structures that may have been overlooked. The HDC plans to complete the resurvey by 2011.

A second National Register District found within the Westminster corporate limits is located on the McDaniel College campus. This National Register District incorporates several of the oldest buildings on the southeast portion of the campus.

Section 2: Local Historic District

In addition to the National Register Districts located in Westminster, there is also a Local Historic District (Map 8.1). The primary distinction between the national and local districts is that the National Register District is primarily an honorary recognition and only provides protection to buildings if a project involves federal funding. The local district is part of the City's Zoning Ordinance and establishes a set of design guidelines that must be followed for any exterior renovations or additions that are made to a property located within the local district. These design guidelines are based on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Properties are designated for inclusion in the Local Historic District on a voluntary basis. At this time only two properties are located within the Local Historic District. As a result, almost all of Westminster's historic resources are not protected by government regulation. The Historic District Commission has developed strategies to expand and improve the Local Historic District over the next five years.

Section 3: Historic District Commission

The Westminster Historic District Commission administers the Local Historic District. The Commission is a group of citizens who have a background or special interest in preservation issues. The Historic District

Commission has focused its efforts on educational programs through the sponsoring of workshops and historic house tours, as well as encouraging historically sensitive rehabilitation through the administration of two rehabilitation tax credits.

Section 4: Maintenance & Preservation

In historic neighborhoods, maintenance of buildings is often an issue. Aging structures usually require a higher level of maintenance than new buildings. While many neighborhoods in Westminster are in good condition, there are some general areas and specific properties that have not been properly maintained. This lack of maintenance degrades the integrity of the structure, reduces property values, and can give the impression that an overall neighborhood is in decline. The Mayor and Common Council of Westminster extended the provisions of the City's Property Maintenance Code to the exteriors of owner occupied properties in an effort to eliminate these negative impacts. In addition, the City offers a variety of programs to encourage the maintenance and rehabilitation of the City's historic structures. Proper maintenance and rehabilitation of historic structures could increase the property values of the structure, as well as the surrounding neighborhood.

Part 5: Historic Preservation Programs

Section 1: Standards for Renovations

Architectural design guidelines, known as 'Standards for Renovations,' were initially adopted in 1978 and currently apply to the portion of Main Street zoned Central Business, generally located between Anchor Street and Longwell Avenue. The purpose of the guidelines is to maintain the historic appearance of downtown Westminster, which is a significant draw for both regular customers and visitors to the area. Projects are currently reviewed for compliance with the design guidelines by staff. During 1997, a committee reviewed and recommended changes to update this uniform set of standards to which developers and property owners must comply when constructing or renovating buildings in this portion of Downtown Westminster. This committee will need to reconvene in the near future to implement these changes and to develop design guidelines for all new construction within Westminster.

Section 2: Local Historic Tax Credit

On April 24, 2000, The Mayor and Common Council of Westminster authorized a Local Historic Tax Credit Program for historically valuable, architecturally valuable or architecturally compatible structures. The purpose of the program is to encourage historically sensitive rehabilitation and construction on qualified properties within the corporate limits. Since 2000, the Westminster Historic District Commission (HDC) has approved 35 projects, totaling over \$107,000 in local tax credits. With support from the HDC, many of these projects went on to also receive state tax credits.

A property is eligible for local historic tax credits if it is located within the City's Local Historic District Zone, or listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places, or identified as a contributing property located within the City's National Register District. The City of Westminster real property tax

credit returns 10% of the qualified expenses for the restoration and preservation of an eligible historic property, applied to the local real property tax liability of the property. It also establishes a tax credit of 5% of the qualified expenses for the construction of an architecturally compatible new structure on an eligible historic property. A second tax credit deals with increases in assessed value resulting from rehabilitation or renovation of historic properties. Often, the value of the 10% tax credit exceeds the five-year tax liability of the property owner.

The HDC is currently evaluating various improvements to the City's local historic tax credit program to increase its utilization. Possible changes include extension of the credit payment period beyond five years, an increased credit for properties located in the Local Historic District and a streamlined process for the "assessment freeze credit."

Section 3: State Historic Tax Credit

The State Income Tax Credit program began on January 1, 1997, and is available to owner-occupied residential properties and income producing properties located in a National Register District or a Local Historic District. Under the program, the property owner can receive an income tax credit equal to 20% of the cost of rehabilitation work. Expenditures for rehabilitation work over a 24-month period must be at least \$5,000 for owner-occupied residences. For income producing properties the minimum is the adjusted basis of the structure or \$5,000, whichever is greater. If the amount of the tax credit is greater than the total income tax owed during the first year in which the credit is claimed, the excess credit is transferred to the owner as a tax rebate in the year the project is completed. The application process for the State Income Tax Credit program includes two steps. First, a structure must be designated as a Certified Heritage Structure. Second, the rehabilitation project(s) must be approved by the Maryland Historical Trust, which requires conformance with the Trust's guidelines.

Section 4: Federal Historic Tax Credit

The Federal Income Tax Incentive consists of a 20% tax credit. This credit is available only to income producing properties that are part of a National Register District and for which renovations conform to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The tax credit can be carried back for one tax year and carried forward for up to 20 years. Expenditures for rehabilitation work over a 24-month period must at least match the adjusted basis of a structure or \$5,000, whichever is greater. In order to expedite the processing of applications, property owners who are applying for both State and Federal Income Tax Credits are required to submit only the federal application forms and the cover sheets of the state application.

Section 5: Certified Local Government Program

According to the US Department of the Interior, the Certified Local Government Program is a preservation partnership between local, state and national governments focused on promoting historic preservation at the grass roots level. The program is jointly administered by the National Park Service (NPS) and the Maryland Historical Trust. Westminster is currently working through the certification

process to become recognized as a Certified Local Government (CLG). As a CLG, the City would be an active partner in the Federal Historic Preservation Program and be able to participate in the opportunities that the program provides.

The key reason the City of Westminster has set the goal to become a CLG, is the access certification provides to the expert technical advice of the State Offices as well as the NPS. Partnerships with the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions, Preserve America, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the National Main Street Center are also networks that CLGs have an opportunity to tap into. Access to Federal funding is another benefit, making certified communities able to access the portion of Federal funds set aside by each the State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) for just CLGs annually. If Westminster becomes a CLG, it will show the community's commitment to keeping what is significant from the past for future generations. As a certified city, it becomes easy to demonstrate a readiness to take on a preservation project and be successful.

Section 6: Preserve America Initiative

Preserve America is a federal initiative that encourages and supports community efforts to preserve and enjoy the nation's priceless cultural and natural heritage. The goals of the program include a greater shared knowledge about the nation's past, strengthened regional identities and local pride, increased local participation in preserving the country's cultural and natural heritage assets, and support for the economic vitality of local communities. The City of Westminster is currently looking to apply for the Preserve America Communities program by 2011.

Preserve America Communities

"Preserve America Communities" is a program that recognizes and designates communities, which protect and celebrate their heritage; use their historic assets for economic development and community revitalization; and encourage people to experience and appreciate local historic resources through education and heritage tourism programs. Benefits of designation include such benefits as White House recognition; eligibility to apply for Preserve America Grants; a certificate of recognition; a Preserve America Community road sign; inclusion in national and regional press releases; official notification of designation to state tourism offices and visitor bureaus; and enhanced community visibility and pride. Preserve America Communities are also featured in National Register Travel Itineraries and in "Teaching with Historic Places" curricular material created by the National Park Service.

Preserve America Grants

Preserve America has awarded more than \$17 million in matching grants, to 228 projects through the country since 2006, to support community efforts that demonstrate sustainable uses of their historic and cultural sites, focusing on economic and educational opportunities related to heritage tourism. This program complements the "Save America's Treasures" grant program, which funds "bricks-and-mortar" projects, by helping local communities develop sustainable resource management strategies and sound business practices for the continued preservation and use of heritage assets.

Part 6: Historic Preservation Partners

Section 1: Maryland Historic Trust

The Maryland Historical Trust (Trust) is a State agency dedicated to preserving and interpreting the legacy of Maryland's past. Through research, conservation and education, the Trust assists the people of Maryland understand their historical and cultural heritage. The Trust is an agency of the Maryland Department of Planning and serves as Maryland's State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

Section 2: Maryland Historical Society

The Maryland Historical Society (Society) serves the people of Maryland, and those interested in Maryland history, through stewardship of comprehensive library and museum collections that are central to the State's history. Since its founding in 1844, the Society has been committed to publishing new scholarship on the State's history and material culture. The Society sponsors a dynamic schedule of educational programs and special events to make Maryland's history come alive for visitors of all ages.

Section 3: Carroll County Historic Preservation Commission

The Carroll County Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) seeks to foster and safeguard the heritage of the County by preserving the sites, structures and districts of historical, archeological, social, or architectural significance within Carroll County. The HPC hears applications for work permits within the Carroll County Historic District Overlay prior to the construction, alteration, reconstruction, repair, moving or demolition of any property within the Overlay that involves exterior changes which would affect the historic, archaeological, or architectural significance of the property, such as repairs, additions, new construction, fencing, and removal of trees.

Section 4: Historical Society of Carroll County

Founded in 1939, the Historical Society of Carroll County (HSCC) is dedicated to the research of piedmont Maryland's cultural heritage and the preservation and interpretation of objects significant to Carroll County history. The HSCC sponsors educational programs, research projects, exhibitions, publications, and community outreach programs to provide broad public access to this region's cultural heritage. Members and volunteers of the HSCC support the preservation of Carroll County history and rich cultural heritage. HSCC collects a wide range of objects, from the eighteenth century to the present, which County residents have used and made in order to document everyday life. Objects collected include household furnishings, fine arts, clothing and household textiles, domestic and craft tools, and the library collection, which includes manuscripts, newspapers, maps, books, and photographs. The HSCC uses these collections for exploring themes of daily life from the settlement of Carroll County to the present through exhibitions, public programs, and publications.

Section 5: Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area

The Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area promotes the stewardship of historic, cultural, and natural Civil War resources, encourages superior visitor experiences, and stimulates tourism, economic prosperity, and educational development, thereby improving the quality of life of the local community for the benefit of both residents and visitors. It is guided by an Advisory board comprised of representatives of local government units, State and national parks, and private organizations from all three heritage area counties: Carroll, Frederick, and Washington.

Section 6: Journey Through Hallowed Ground Partnership

The Journey Through Hallowed Ground Partnership (Partnership) is a non-profit organization dedicated to raising national awareness of the unparalleled history in the region, which generally follows the Old Carolina Road (Route 15/231) from Gettysburg, through Maryland, to Monticello in Albemarle County, Virginia. From its communities, farms, businesses and heritage sites, the Partnership has an opportunity to celebrate and preserve this vital fabric of America which stands today in the historic, scenic and natural beauty of this region. The Partnership is dedicated to encouraging both Americans and world visitors to appreciate, respect, and experience the local cultural landscape. Working in partnership with local, State and national leaders and residents, the Partnership plans to create and support a National Scenic Byway and a National Heritage Area to sustain and strengthen the local economy, heritage and quality of life in this region.

Part 7: Protection of Historic Resources

Section 1: City Projects

The most recent City Capital Improvement Project, which served to preserve and enhance Westminster's historic neighborhoods, was the compatible reconstruction of the State highways which pass through the National Register District. When East Main Street was reconstructed in 1994, the original plans were changed radically to avoid widening the street and to protect the traditional character of Main Street. In addition, brick sidewalks and crosswalks were added, trees and planting beds installed, and on-street parking maintained. This project resulted in preservation of the historic layout and appearance of the street. The East Main Street reconstruction project was recognized by two federal agencies during 1997. First, the project was included as a model in the National Trust publication *Smart States, Better Communities*. In addition, the project received an Environmental Excellence Award for Excellence in Historic and Archeological Preservation from the Federal Highway Administration. The reconstructions of West Main Street and Pennsylvania Avenue were modeled after the East Main Street project due to its success. Moreover, the public improvements made to East Main Street have encouraged private investment in the adjoining properties.

Section 2: Development Regulations

Current subdivision regulations do not provide any specific protection to historic resources in Westminster. In many cases historic homes are now surrounded by new residential development. Although these structures have been preserved, they have lost integrity due to the close proximity of the new development. Subdivision regulations could be amended to ensure the protection of historic structures when a development occurs. Careful consideration would need to be given to maintaining the integrity of historic properties by providing an adequately sized lot. This would allow a portion of the surrounding landscape to be retained and protect the historic structure from visual intrusions of new development.

In the event that a historically valuable structure is scheduled to be demolished in the National Register District, the property owner is required to meet with City staff and the Historic District Commission to discuss alternative uses and site design that could save the structure. If the owner elects to proceed with demolition, he or she is required to submit an archiving report. The report contains a written component describing the historic value, history, and notable features of the structure, as well as a graphic component that includes floor plan drawings and photographs.

Community Character & Design Element

The 2009 Comprehensive Plan recognizes the importance of a positive community image and quality community design to assist the City of Westminster in instilling a sense of pride and well-being in the City, assuring quality employment, and improving tourism. The City supports the public commitment to preserve existing neighborhoods and recognizes the importance of developing new neighborhoods in a way that is compatible with the historic character of Westminster. The Community Character and Design Element is a combination of the preservation of the physical setting, natural resources, and the historic character of the City.

Goals and Objectives

Goal D1: Support the Westminster Historic District Commission's efforts to encourage the preservation of historic resources throughout the Westminster area

Objective 1: Partner with local, regional and State historic preservation organizations and agencies to promote historic preservation

- a. Collaborate with the Carroll County Historic Preservation Commission to foster and safeguard the heritage of the County by preserving the sites and structures of historical, archeological, social, or architectural significance
- b. Work with the Historic Society of Carroll County to advocate Westminster's history and culture through interpretive and educational programs
- c. Assist the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area to promote the stewardship of local historic, cultural, and natural Civil War resources
- d. Coordinate with the Journey Through Hallowed Ground Partnership to conserve and enhance the scenic, historic and cultural characteristics of the region

Objective 2: Maintain an accurate assessment of the condition of Westminster's historic fabric

- a. Re-survey the City's National Register District and State-listed properties, noting alterations, demolitions to historic properties not presently included in the District
- b. Submit applications for historically valuable properties not presently in the National Register District for consideration of inclusion in both state and federal registries
- c. Develop a "Preservation Plan" for Westminster that would focus on the interpretation and preservation of the historic fabric within the City

Objective 3: Educate property owners regarding the architectural and historical significance of their properties

- a. Organize public information workshops on the history and architecture of Westminster
- b. Create a program to allow for owners of properties, located in the Local Historic District, to receive a historical plaque and to be included in a walking tour
- c. Evaluate and revise the existing local historic tax credit program to increase utilization
- d. Inform property owners on the benefits of historic tax credits to improve and revitalize historic properties
- e. Market the benefits of the Local Historic District to property owners

Objective 4: Increase public awareness and appreciation of the benefits of historic preservation through outreach and educational programs

- a. Host the Westminster Historic House Tour as a part of cultural heritage tourism efforts and of a campaign to educate the public on the historic assets of their community
- b. Coordinate the Annual Historic Scavenger Hunt for the community to encourage residents to appreciate the historic character and design of Westminster
- c. Celebrate Historic Preservation Month as an opportunity to increase awareness of the importance of historic preservation using marketing projects and educational programs
- d. Promote the Community Media Center's Carroll County History Project as an ongoing program to preserve the history of the Carroll County and the memories of its residents

Goal D2: Maintain the image and identity of a visually cohesive community to residents and visitors

Objective 1: Use the historical character of Westminster as a tool to unify the community

- a. Market the history of Westminster as a source of community pride
- b. Promote the use of compatible interpretive signs, roadside markers and informational materials to connect the historical assets of the City
- c. Support the coordination of regular historical house and business walking tours

Objective 2: Develop pedestrian-friendly environments in Westminster that interconnect neighborhoods to community facilities while creating a pleasant walking experience

- a. Create human scale pedestrian amenities in Westminster
- b. Require appropriate design standards, as well as other techniques and methods in the development of pedestrian-oriented areas
- c. Encourage safe and convenient pedestrian traffic in the design of streets
- d. Plan and promote pedestrian/bicycle connections to and through residential neighborhoods

Objective 3: Market the arts as a vital contributor to community design and identity

- a. Include a variety of artwork and arts activities in public places, such as parks, public buildings and plazas
- b. Support efforts to expand arts resources in the community, such as arts and crafts learning opportunities, art exhibits, shows, and competitions
- c. Require private developments to consider incorporating artwork into the design of their projects or sites

Objective 4: Promote the preservation of neighborhood identity and visual character

- a. Educate neighborhoods on how to receive a Local Historic District designation
- b. Support infill and redevelopment projects that reflect sensitivity to site and neighborhood conditions
- c. Encourage the Historic District Commission to work with neighborhoods to record, publicize, and disseminate to the City Planning Department the list of features characterizing their area
- d. Provide signage that identifies sites of historical or environmental significance in Westminster neighborhoods

Goal D3: Promote Westminster’s diverse architectural heritage by preserving and promoting an array of architectural periods, building types, and design styles in all new development

Objective 1: Develop a “Design Guidelines and Manual” for residential and commercial development

- a. Coordinate with the County Planning Staff to incorporate the “Carroll County’s Design Expectations” into the “Design Guidelines and Manual”
- b. Study the history, architecture and overall character of Westminster when developing the “Design Guidelines and Manual” to ensure compatibility with existing development
- c. Include in the “Design Guidelines and Manual” specific direction on all commercial, industrial, multi-family and tourism development in Westminster
- d. Address specific community design issues such as site planning, pedestrian access, vehicular access and parking, building design, landscape and site design
- e. Ensure a consistent pattern of development by using the “Design Guidelines and Manual” with the Community Character and Design Element

Objective 2: Promote quality design that preserves and enhances the character of Westminster

- a. Encourage developments to focus on quality and distinction by blending the natural and built environments
- b. Guide development to reflect Westminster’s heritage and to foster a sense of community pride
- c. Integrate new development with the existing character of the surrounding area when the existing development already conforms to this Element
- d. Include the Historic District Commission in the development review process for new construction or renovation projects within the National Register District

Objective 3: Protect historic resources during development and renovation projects

- a. Evaluate the protection of historic resources during the development review process
- b. Require that the architectural style of new development take into consideration the architecture of the surrounding neighborhood in style, scale, and choice of materials

- c. Ensure that historically valuable structures scheduled to be demolished are archived in accordance with the standards prescribed by the City

Goal D4: Recognize the importance of community facilities, public spaces and gateways as opportunities to promote a sense of place and welcoming environment for residents and visitors

Objective 1: Develop and preserve public and civic buildings that enhance the identity of an area as well reinforce connections with the historic character and surrounding neighborhoods

- a. Place buildings in central locations as highly visible focal points
- b. Face buildings toward public streets or public common areas
- c. Promote architecture to elevate the prominence, permanence, and civic importance of the structure through enhanced height, mass, and materials
- d. Include historic City-owned buildings in the Local Historic District to demonstrate a commitment to historic preservation and to protect these valuable buildings

Objective 2: Encourage the use of both community character and pedestrian scale elements to design public spaces and facilities

- a. Use lighting in public spaces that promotes safety and discourages crime, creates an inviting nighttime atmosphere, and does not intrude upon neighboring properties
- b. Increase the use of public space and facilities through careful attention to the design and appearance of the streetscape, walkways and paths
- c. Promote public art projects that build on local talent to create unique landmarks along streets and parks, at civic gathering places, and within neighborhoods

Objective 3: Partner with local businesses, residents and developers to design the gateway corridors of the community that will become attractive entrances into the City of Westminster

- a. Implement the short term goals of the MD 27 Gateway Corridor Plan to create a welcoming gateway for residents and visitors entering Downtown Westminster
- b. Create a strategic action plan to implement the long term goals of the MD 27 Gateway Corridor Plan and market it to potential developers and the Main Street community
- c. Study the MD 140 Gateway Corridor to determine opportunities to revitalize the area from a cluttered highway to an attractive boulevard to welcome residents and visitors

- d. Develop a MD 140 Gateway Corridor Plan to promote enhanced site planning, improved landscaping, efficient parking lot design, coordinated access, amenities and signage

Goal D5: Require that all buildings and properties in Westminster are properly maintained according to applicable standards

Objective 1: Inform property owners about the availability of local, state, and federal programs for the improvement of property

- a. Develop informational materials about property improvement programs, and distribute materials directly to property owners
- b. Sponsor information sessions and workshops regarding programs for the improvement of property

Objective 2: Promote tax incentives programs for the rehabilitation of historic properties

- a. Continue to offer and refine local incentive programs for rehabilitation projects
- b. Continue to distribute information about the tax credits to new owners of historic properties in Westminster
- c. Sponsor information sessions regarding tax incentive programs
- d. Study the feasibility of extending the tax credit to County tax liability

Objective 3: Consider use of the City's ability to secure or improve uninhabitable abandoned structures with significant historic value, rather than allowing these structures to be demolished

- a. Monitor the condition and occupancy of "at-risk" buildings with significant historic value
- b. Develop public-private partnerships as appropriate in order to preserve important structures