



WESTMINSTER HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 5, 2022
TO: Sara Imhulse, City Administrator
FROM: Historic District Commission
RE: Proposed Historic Preservation Implementation Plan

The Westminster Historic District Commission (HDC) recognizes that there are additional preservation initiatives that would benefit the City of Westminster to achieve its goals of preserving and enhancing the City's historic districts, strengthening the downtown economy, and protecting the historic properties in the City. The HDC spent the beginning of 2022 conducting research on historic district best practices, gathering information from other historic districts within Maryland and surrounding jurisdictions, and reviewing the Westminster Comprehensive Plan 2009 (revised). Following a group workshop and several discussions, the HDC has recommended several strategies to implement preservation initiatives in the City.

The HDC found many ideas and approaches throughout the region to consider. Several of the various historic districts and information the HDC researched can be found at the end of this document. Based on its research, the HDC recommends viewing the demolition information from Chestertown, MD, and the alteration permit process to limit damage to historic properties information from Lititz PA, as this information is directly related to the HDC recommended strategies to implement preservation initiatives in the City.

Although the information gathered for various historic districts helped guide the HDC, the Westminster Comprehensive Plan, Chapter 8 – Community Character and Design, Goals and Objectives are the basis of the recommended implementation strategies. No recommendations to the existing Comprehensive Plan are proposed. The Goals and Objectives of the Comprehensive Plan are provided and the recommended implementation strategies are highlighted in the attached proposed Historic Preservation Implementation Plan.

The HDC seeks guidance from the Mayor and Common Council on the approval and prioritization of the recommended implementation strategies.

RESOURCES

Uniontown examples:

- <https://www.carrollcountymd.gov/media/14444/hpc-public-outreach-trifold.pdf>
- <https://www.carrollcountymd.gov/government/boards-commissions/historic-preservation-commission/>
- Main rule book: <https://www.carrollcountymd.gov/media/2480/d-guidelines.pdf>

Ellicott City

- <https://historicec.com>
- <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/planning-zoning/historic-planning>

Chestertown

- <https://townofchestertown.com/government/committees/historic-district-commission/>
- Guidelines: <https://townofchestertown.com/all-documents/guidelines/historic-district-guidelines>

PA: Gettysburg, Carlisle, and Lititz

- <https://www.gettysburgpa.gov/historic-architectural-review-board-harb>
- https://www.carlislepa.org/government/boards___commissions/historical_and_architectural_review_board.php
- <https://www.lititzborough.org/historical-area-advisory-committee>

ATTACHMENTS

Historic Preservation Implementation Plan

City of Westminster Historic District Commission

Historic Preservation Implementation Plan

WESTMINSTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
Community Character & Design
Chapter 8: Community Character & Design

PART 4: WESTMINSTER HISTORIC PRESERVATION (Page 147)

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.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY 1:

Building on this inventory of recognized local historic resources, the HCD would like to expand the focus of valued historic properties to include those that are listed on the Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties and within the City limits. An example of an important historic property not within the Westminster National Register of Historic Places Nomination District would be Roop's Mill. It is in an annexed portion of the City, but not within the Historic District and therefore not afforded specific preservation assistance. The HDC would like to see all Westminster National Historic Register of Historic Places Nominated Properties and all Maryland State Inventory of Historic Properties listed within the City limits be included as eligible for local tax credits.

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.

IMPEMETATION STARTEGY 2:

The HDC recommends that the City and HDC pursue funding for updated documentation for the inventory of the entire City of Westminster. Grants may be available from both Federal and State preservation agencies; however, a significant match of funding will also be required.

In addition, cultural landscape resources need to be specifically addressed as a preservation goal. An example of this would be to include the coach step at 206 East Main St. in front of the Shellman House and dates from the early 1800s. There are various boot scrapes and the boundary stone between the old Baltimore and Frederick County that has no protection.

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.

IMPEMETATION STARTEGY 3:

Generally, the City and the HDC need to raise awareness about tax credit opportunities, and the importance of complaints (of neglected properties.) Outreach opportunities include, providing information in water/sewer bills, having a presence at the City's Flower & Jazz, and other downtown festivals and events, working with local realtors and contractors, and offering workshops on how to apply for tax credits.

Better signage is needed in the downtown historic district, along with a more comprehensive (but digestible) explanation of what being in the historic district means. The HDC recommends a program of signs be provided along major corridors so that the Historic District is clear to tourists and residents.

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.

IMPEMETATION STARTEGY 4:

The City Code references the importance of and need to preserve the archeological history of the City, but no real effort has been made to include archeological resources into our tax credits or historic district inventory. More deliberate efforts must be created to appropriately care for these resources.

Demolition, either directly or by neglect has cost the community the oldest house in the City. The HDC recommends establishing regulatory approval of demolition permits and neglected properties, including the ability to work directly with property owners. New regulations would be modeled after those of Chestertown, MD.

The HDC also recommends regulatory approval for all new alterations to the exterior and selected interiors of historic properties. The selected interiors would only be for those structures that have historic elements listed in the Westminster National Register of Historic Places Nomination or as listed in the Maryland State Inventory of Historic Properties. The review would be modeled after the requirements of Lititz, PA as a simple approach for a small community.

PART 5: HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAMS (Page 148)

Section1: 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.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY 5:

The HDC recommends that the "Standards of Renovations" become required, as opposed to guidelines, for all alterations, improvements, and repairs for listed properties. HDC further recommends that the approval authority for the application of the Standards of Renovation fall under the responsibility of the HDC, similar to the Lititz, PA model.

Likewise, the HDC recommends that the new standards for demolition and demolition by neglect, as outlined above in Implementation Strategy 4, be incorporated into the Standards for Renovation for Westminster. HDC further recommends that the approval authority for the application of the new standards for demolition and demolition by neglect fall under the responsibility of the HDC, similar to the Chestertown, MD model.

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

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY 6:

The HDC recommends changing the tax credit program to require properties that have received a tax credit be added to the historic district. This is a voluntary way to increase the participation of applicants to the Local Historic District and ensure the public investment of the tax credit is protected.

The HDC recommends that the Local Historic Tax Credit be increased to least 20% for the five years. This should be a very big help to local businesses struggling on Main Street.

PART 7: PROTECTION OF HISTORIC RESOURCES (Page 152)

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.

IMPEMETATION STARTEGY 7:

The HDC recommends that the City-owned buildings that are historic be rezoned to the Historic District Zone and require the appropriate review and assistance as other listed properties. In addition, applications should be completed for all City-owned property for inclusion into the Maryland Inventory of Historic Places.

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.

IMPEMETATION STARTEGY 8:

The HDC recommends that a study be performed to determine whether the existing subdivision regulations for new development impact historic properties. HDC further recommends that, if the existing subdivision regulations for new development impact historic properties, new subdivision regulations be developed to protect historic properties.