Westminster Existing Conditions Snapshot

Draft V5: July 3, 2019

This document communicates a high level analysis of existing conditions and issues affecting the City of Westminster. Establishing the existing conditions baseline is an important step in the process of updating the Westminster Comprehensive Plan. This analysis provides context of key subjects identified by the community and staff during the first phase of the input process and reflects values articulated in the City’s Vision. It is intended to provide the reader high level background and understanding about these key topics, as well as a baseline for ongoing discussion and evaluation of information and trends important to the city’s physical development.

This document serves as a snapshot of key information at this point in time, with the most up to date information available as of early 2019. Some of this information is particularly susceptible to becoming dated or less applicable over time. Therefore, it is particularly useful at the beginning of the Westminster Forward planning process to provide insight on specific issues before the goal and policy direction is established. A list of documents and resources used to form this report are included at the end of the report.

Context and Introduction

Relationship to the Region

The City of Westminster sits between the cities of Boulder and Denver, located 12 miles from Downtown Denver and 13 miles from Boulder in the northwest quadrant of the Denver Metropolitan (Denver Metro) area. The city is bordered by the City and County of Broomfield, the cities of Arvada, Thornton, Northglenn, and Federal Heights, and unincorporated Adams and Jefferson counties. The western portion of the city directly abuts the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge in Jefferson County.

Two major highways traverse the city—US Highway 36 (US 36), connecting the city northwest to Boulder and the mountains, and Interstate 25 (I-25), running between Denver and Fort Collins. The city also benefits from direct access to the Denver International Airport by Regional Transportation District (RTD) bus and commuter rail service and is
served by the Rocky Mountain Metropolitan Airport, a public-use operator with a number of operations though this facility currently does not have commercial airline service.

The city’s land area is expansive, encompassing 34 square miles, located within two counties, Adams and Jefferson, as well as three separate school districts. The planning boundary of this Comprehensive Plan coincides with the outer extent of the existing city limits, with the exception of a few areas at the southwest and southeast portions of the city that are enclaves of unincorporated Jefferson and Adams counties, respectively.

The City of Westminster is one of 46 communities that signed the Mile High Compact, a voluntary agreement among metro area cities and counties to manage growth and ensure consistency with regional planning efforts by the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG). Last updated in 2017, the DRCOG’s Metro Vision 2040 Plan outlines that regional direction for land use and transportation planning throughout the Denver metropolitan region.

The Metro Vision 2040 Plan establishes five Urban Centers in the city—North I-25, South Westminster (Westminster Station), West 120th Avenue (Park Centre), Downtown Westminster (Westminster Center), and Westminster Promenade (Church Ranch). An Urban Center is defined by DRCOG as a multimodal, dense, and mixed-use development node that could be developed or intensified to provide a balance of jobs and housing units. Metro Vision uses Urban Centers as the basis for decision making about regional growth, in particular the formation of a regional transportation system.

Physical Factors Influencing Development

Westminster’s growth and land use patterns have been influenced by the natural features of the Front Range landscape, constrained by abutting political boundaries, and organized by major transportation infrastructure. The city takes on an irregular shape due to being surrounded by municipalities and a natural area, limiting the ability to grow outward as the population increases. However, other factors such as water and sewer availability, transportation facilities, and the network of parks, open spaces and golf courses also play important roles in the location and amount of new development.

The city’s gently rolling hills are interspersed with creek corridors and waterbodies including Little Dry Creek, Walnut Creek, and Big Dry Creek and their tributaries, as well as Standley Lake, McKay Lake, Lower Church Ranch, and Hidden Lake. In addition to the natural function of these features, the City relies on its waterbodies and creek corridors for drainage and in some cases water supply. Floodplains and wetlands areas provide important wildlife habitat, but also constrain locations for new development. The majority of this sensitive habitat area is part of the city’s open space network, which comprises 3,100 acres of land within the city. Additional sensitive habitat area is located within the city’s 2,910 acres of park land and 644 acres of public golf courses.

Much of Westminster is atop a ridge that results in significant slopes in some areas that exceed 15 percent grade. These areas include land north of 120th Avenue near Federal Parkway and south of
84th Avenue near Lowell and Federal boulevards. While development in these locations is limited by steep slopes, it is enhanced by the views of the mountains and downtown Denver.

Manmade features such as major transportation corridors also shape the city’s development. Westminster’s roadway system is based on a grid of major roadways that generally extend throughout the Denver Metro area. Two major regional transportation corridors are US Highway 36 which cuts diagonally through the city, and Interstate 25, which defines the city’s northeastern boundary. These major roadways provide for transit and connectivity, but are also physical barriers to travel and development in parts of the city. Other important routes that provide regional access and connectivity include:

- Wadsworth Parkway (State Highway 121, the only through route from Broomfield to Highlands Ranch),
- 120th Avenue (US 287/State Highway 128),
- Sheridan Boulevard (State Highway 95 south of US 36), and
- Federal Boulevard (US 287).
- 88th Avenue, which becomes Hwy 72 providing one of the few routes west into the Front Range.
- 104th Avenue, which provides access to Hwy 36, Interstate 25 and continues east of Westminster as Hwy 44.

The City of Westminster supports commuter rail transit to Denver and the eventual completion of the FasTracks Northwest Corridor commuter rail line to toward Boulder as funding/financing becomes available. Three potential stations along the planned line are located in the city at Westminster Station, located at 3200 Westminster Station Drive near 70th Avenue and Hooker Street, Downtown Westminster near 88th Avenue and Harlan Street, and Church Ranch just north of the Shops at Walnut Creek. Westminster Station was funded as part of RTD’s Eagle P3 project and opened on July 25, 2016. It is an end-of-line station until funding becomes available for the remainder of the Northwest Corridor. The City of Westminster has continued to pursue efforts to extend the commuter rail line through Downtown Westminster and Church Ranch.

Development is also influenced by activity that requires additional considerations, such as the Rocky Mountain Metropolitan Airport and oil and gas extraction. Noise-related impacts and critical zones beyond Airport boundaries impact the types of land uses and development patterns that are appropriate in these areas. Westminster also has oil and gas extraction locations and ongoing interest to consider in development decisions. While existing wells are primarily concentrated in the North I-25 area, there has been interest in well sites in the vicinity of Standley Lake, Westminster Hills Open Space, and Rocky Flats.

Water Supply Influences Growth

Westminster’s potable water supply comes from the Clear Creek watershed and the city is located within the South Platte River Basin. Standley Lake is the water storage reservoir used for the city, as well as for Northglenn, Thornton, and Farmers Reservoir and Irrigation Company (FRICO). Water
originating from the South Platte River Basin makes up approximately 90% of the City’s water supply. Water in this basin has been over-appropriated—meaning there is not sufficient water available in the basin to fill the needs of all water rights holders. Ten percent of Westminster’s water supply comes from Denver Water, much of which is “trans-basin” water, meaning it originates from the Western Slope. Water availability on the Western Slope is also limited and moving water from the Western Slope is politically and legally difficult.

The majority of Westminster’s water supply comes from several irrigation ditches constructed in the mid-19th century, including the Farmers’ High Line Canal (FHL), Croke Canal, Church Ditch, the Kershaw Ditch, and the Manhart Ditch. These ditches along with currently two reservoirs (Standley Lake and Jim Baker Reservoir) serve as the City’s primary water supply. A third reservoir complex near Brighton, named Wattenberg Reservoir, is under construction now and will yield resiliency for water supply for the City by providing a reservoir of water to ensure downstream flows.

Westminster’s water supply is finite. Remaining opportunities to increase water supply yield of the system is primarily centered on increasing operational efficiency and expanding reservoir storage. The magnitude and pace of development is defined by Council’s City Vision which includes the concept of the next Urban Center along with being one of the most sustainable cities in America. To be truly sustainable, the City must live within the resources it has available to it. To meet this Vision a variety of factors, including water supply and infrastructure, is weighed and thoughtfully balanced in this Comprehensive Plan.

Policy Documents Influencing Development

The City of Westminster has an extensive history of planning for the future, and local and regional planning efforts—both existing and upcoming—guide various aspects of the city’s growth and development. Currently, the city is directed by 48 recent plans, including:

- 2013 Comprehensive Plan
- 2030 Bicycle Master Plan
- Mobility Action Plan 2017
- Water Conservation Plan 2013
- Parks and Recreation Master Plan 2010-2014
- Westminster Public Library Master Plan 2017-2021
- 2014 Open Space Stewardship Plan
- Strategic Plan
- Westminster Station Area Specific Plan
- Downtown Specific Plan
- Affordable & Workforce Housing Strategic Plan 2017
- Financial Sustainability Plan
- Hazard Mitigation Plan
- DRCOG Metro Vision
The City’s Strategic Plan is used across the organization to reinforce the vision for day-to-day operations, services, and long-term capital investment projects like road construction, water distribution and sewer maintenance, and is reviewed annually to inform the budget. Substantively updated most recently in 2016, the Strategic Plan reflects the City’s current vision. The current vision states:

*Westminster is the next Urban Center of the Colorado Front Range. It is a vibrant inclusive, creative and well-connected city. People choose Westminster because it is a dynamic community with distinct neighborhoods, quality educational opportunities and a resilient local economy that includes: a spectrum of jobs; diverse, integrated housing; and shopping, cultural, entertainment, and restaurant options. It embraces the outdoors and is one of the most sustainable cities in America.*

To implement this vision the Strategic Plan is organized around six goals:

1. Visionary Leadership, Effective Governance and Proactive Regional Collaboration
2. Vibrant, Inclusive and Engaged Community
3. Beautiful, Desirable, Safe and Environmentally Responsible City
4. Dynamic, Diverse Economy
5. Financially Sustainable Government Providing Excellence in City Services
6. Ease of Mobility

Nested within these Strategic Plan goals are specific objectives and prioritized action items are desired instructive to long range planning and land development, including a citywide commitment to sustainability; a desire to make a Westminster a regional leader in affordable and workforce housing; building a sense of community; distinctive neighborhoods; improving resident wellness; master planned infrastructure and financing strategy; and improved walkability, bikeability, and mass transit options throughout Westminster.

The existing Comprehensive Plan, Land Development Code and related regulations are not in alignment with the vision of the Strategic Plan. Bridging this gap is one of the primary goals of these efforts which include the work on plans under the umbrella of “Westminster Forward.” In addition to this Comprehensive Plan Update, Westminster has upcoming plans and projects that will continue to build on its existing planning efforts. These include:

- Sustainability Plan
- Parks, Recreation, and Libraries Plan
- Transportation & Mobility Plan
- Water Supply Plan Update
- Unified Development Code with Design Standards

Planning efforts by surrounding municipalities and counties, as well as those regarding the US 36 Corridor and the Rocky Mountain Metropolitan Airport also have direct impacts on Westminster’s future, and require effective regional collaboration.
Adams County: The County's Comprehensive Plan (2012) encourages new urban residential growth in unincorporated infill areas and within municipal and county growth areas to reduce impacts to the County and maximize access to services and existing infrastructure. The plan also focuses its efforts on attracting new industrial and employment uses in both incorporated and unincorporated areas, and emphasizes annexation of enclaves into municipalities. Additionally, the County adopted a Balanced Housing Plan in 2018.

Jefferson County: Currently being updated, the County’s Comprehensive Master Plan is comprised of multiple area plans and comprehensive development plans that guide land use and physical planning throughout the county. Westminster is located within the County’s North Plains Area Plan, which provides direction for unincorporated land surrounded by the city, much of which is located in enclaves along the Wadsworth Boulevard corridor.

US 36 Corridor: The Northwest Area Mobility Study (NAMS) represents consensus between RTD, CDOT, corridor stakeholders and local jurisdictions on short and long-term transit improvements in the corridor. The document identifies five major priorities. As a component of the voter-approved 2004 FasTracks program, the Northwest Corridor improvements along US 36 include a commuter rail line from Denver's Union Station, enhanced bus service and infrastructure, and a managed toll/high occupancy vehicle/bus lane. These improvements provide improved multimodal transportation options between Boulder and Denver, and benefit existing development and enhance future development opportunities around the Westminster Center and Church Ranch park-and-rides.

Rocky Mountain Metropolitan Airport: The Rocky Mountain Metropolitan Airport is located in Jefferson County just northwest of Westminster's city limits. Jefferson County owns and operates the airport, and completed an update to the airport’s master plan in 2011. The master plan provides projections for airport operations and development on airport-owned land as well as land use guidance for lands within its Airport Influence Area, and most importantly, within its Instrument Critical Zone. The City of Westminster continues to work with Jefferson County as land use and transportation decisions are made for surrounding areas, especially as the airport expands their operations and facilities.

City and County of Broomfield: Westminster shares a partial northern and western boundary with the City and County of Broomfield. Broomfield’s Comprehensive Plan (2016) emphasizes revitalization of the area’s older commercial and industrial uses along Main Street (which turns into Westminster Boulevard in Westminster to the south). With few remaining opportunities for annexation, Broomfield is focusing on infill and redevelopment, as well as reinvestment in its older neighborhoods.

City of Thornton: The City of Thornton shares the I-25 corridor boundary at the northeast end of Westminster. The cities participate in a retail sales tax revenue sharing agreement along I-25 between 128th and 150th avenues to the south and north and Huron and Washington streets to the west and east. The agreement supports growth of commercial and employment uses in both cities.
As of 2012, the City of Thornton's Comprehensive Plan designates the I-25 corridor area as Regional Commercial and Employment Center, focused at the I-25 and E-470 interchange. Thornton is currently in the process of updating its Comprehensive Plan to accommodate significant additional population growth.

**City of Northglenn:** The City of Northglenn abuts a portion of the eastern boundary of Westminster between 104th and 120th avenues. Northglenn's Comprehensive Plan (2010) designates the Huron Street and 120th Avenue corridors with primarily single family residential and some commercial use.

**City of Federal Heights:** The City of Federal Heights borders Westminster to the east along Federal Boulevard between 84th and 104th avenues. Land along Federal Boulevard is primarily zoned commercial, and includes many older strip commercial centers, as well as some significant vacant land along Federal between 96th Avenue and 103rd Avenue where an airport was once in operation. To the east, the border between the two cities along Zuni Street includes Water World water park and industrial areas.

**City of Arvada:** The City of Arvada adjoins Westminster along the south and west boundary of the city. Wadsworth Boulevard/Wadsworth Parkway is a key corridor that runs north-south between both cities. The City of Arvada's Comprehensive Plan (2014) calls for primarily commercial development at key nodes along Wadsworth Boulevard and Sheridan Boulevard, with residential for the remainder of the border.

**Macro Trends and Demographics**

Incorporated in 1911, Westminster began as a small community centered on a commercial district near West 73rd Avenue and Bradburn Boulevard. The city remained relatively small until the post-World War II era. Since 1950, the population has grown from 1,686 to approximately 113,479 persons as of 2018, moving the city to be the eighth most populated city in Colorado. During that same period, the city's land area increased from 4.5 square miles to 34 square miles, resulting from the annexation of large tracts of vacant lands to the north and west. This expansion was facilitated in part by the purchase of water resource rights that provided the city with greater capacity for development.

Between 2020 and 2050, Colorado's statewide population is projected to increase by 2.3 million people, with the Denver Metro Area absorbing about 38% (Colorado Department of Local Affairs). Westminster's 2017 Housing Needs Assessment identifies the need for an additional 9,500 units to meet current and future needs out to 2032 using the existing 2.58 persons per household assumption that would establish a future population of around 137,384 persons. Recent permitting trends indicate that many multifamily units are studio or one-bedroom plans. As such, the 2.58 persons per household assumption and consequent housing unit need and associated unit demand will need to be regularly evaluated. DRCOG forecasts around 151,200 people in Westminster by 2040, however this number is likely not considered relative to specific conditions in Westminster such as utility and site constraints.
The 2018 Citizen Survey indicates goals and services that the city should continue to focus on. Of the 15 choices given to respondents, a majority identified each as essential or very important, but water and sewer infrastructure, life and safety services, street maintenance, access to parks and recreational opportunities, and multi-modal infrastructure surfaced as continuing priorities to maintain the quality of life valued by residents today.

Demographic Factors

Westminster’s population grew by 51% between 1990 and 2017, or from 74,444 to 112,874 residents. Adams and Jefferson Counties also experienced significant growth in that same period, at 89% and 31% respectively. Regardless of the exact rate of growth, 20 years from now Westminster will be older and more diverse, mirroring demographic trends forecasted for many Front Range communities and the U.S. as a whole.

Figure 1. Comparison of Population Growth to Surrounding Municipalities

Impacts and Effects of an Aging Population

Data from the 2017 Housing Needs Assessment and U.S. Census show the city's senior population increasing. Currently, residents age 35-54 represent the largest share of Westminster's population at 28%, followed by 5-19 year old (19%) and 25-34 year olds (16%). The fastest growing age segment is 55-64 years old, increasing by over 7,300 people since 2000 and including residents who will soon be retiring from the workforce. The number of residents between 55 and 64 years old and those older than 65 more than doubled since 2000 and now represent a quarter of the total population.

With many of our seniors expected to “age in place,” this significant increase in older residents will create a range of impacts and market demands for the built environment and allocation of municipal services. Accommodating an aging population has implications across the board; from
health care and related businesses, accessibility, transportation, and public safety to a demand for a wider diversity of housing, retail trade, and land use planning. This is seen at the State, county and local levels across the Front Range.

Figure 2. Population by Age Group

In order to age in place, considerations to land use, transportation, and access to parks and recreation will need to be made in order to improve the livability of communities for senior residents. The locations of homes in suburban areas characterized by low-density development patterns and limited transportation alternatives also impacts quality of life for seniors. Walking is important for the mobility and recreation for older people, and existing transit service could be improved to support this age cohort. Development of mixed use and transit-oriented developments are a step in the right direction to diversify housing stock and improve access to basic services using alternative transportation options, as driving a personal vehicle safely often becomes less feasible for older adults.

Diverse Residents and Inclusive Cultures

One of the City’s primary goals is to create a “Vibrant, Inclusive, and Engaged Community” by providing “options for an inclusive, demographically diverse citizenry in unique settings with community identity, ownership and sense of place, with easy access to amenities, shopping, employment, and diverse integrated housing options.” As part of the Welcoming America’s Welcoming Cities and Counties Initiative, the City of Westminster strives to be more than merely diverse: it strives for inclusion. With the formation of the Inclusivity Board in 2015, a dedication to ensuring that all people can take part in economic, civic, and social life became a standard to embed in planning efforts. It requires that residents, business-owners, and workers be treated with respect, fairness and equality of services. Inclusion extends to race, immigration status, ethnicity,
sex, sexual orientation, gender identification or expression, religion, national origin, age, or physical or mental ability.

To create an inclusive culture citywide and respond to increased diversification, preferences and specific challenges for various populations need to be considered. Westminster is making strides in the right direction, with the City being awarded second place in the National League of Cities' 2017 Cultural Diversity Awards for the development of the Westminster Inclusivity Board and its advocacy for all voices within our community. Considerations such as cultural expectations, age, and physical and mental ability are necessary in order to create a sense of community, inclusive and welcoming neighborhoods, and appropriate housing and facilities that serve the diverse city population.

As Westminster’s population grows, the city is gaining greater diversity in its residents from a cultural perspective. About 10% of Westminster residents were born in another country, of which 33% are Asian, and 17% of households speak a language other than English at home. Spanish, Hmong and Vietnamese are the three most common languages spoken, after English. Census data shows that residents born in other countries generally make less money and a higher ratio of such homeowners are cost-burdened than native-born.

The Hispanic/Latinx population grew by 60% from the year 2000 to 2017, with 22% of all Westminster residents identifying as Hispanic/Latinx of any race. Westminster's Hispanic/Latinx families and foreign-born families are generally larger than average, with household sizes averaging 3.44 persons compared to the lower average of 2.50 persons for all households in Westminster. This may increase demand for larger housing units, intergenerational housing, or accessory dwelling units (ADUs).

The 2017 Housing Needs Assessment, based on 2014 – 2015 data, indicated two neighborhoods have poverty rates exceeding three times the city's overall poverty rate, though these are not specifically named in the Assessment. These neighborhoods are ethnically concentrated, have above average “limited English proficiency” populations, and have high proportions of single parent families. This indicates vulnerability in the diverse populations of the city. Considerations of language access, food access, housing support, child care and education, access to services, and cultural programming in recreation activities can make significant impacts to the long-term inclusion of these residents.

Several local organizations provide support to minority communities, such as Cultivando and Growing Home. These non-profits promote and support equitable access to quality of life services and amenities and serve as a bridge between city services and minority residents and youth. Growing Home has had a significant presence in Westminster helping disadvantaged and vulnerable families and individuals through a variety of programs, from homelessness prevention to education support. Cultivando targets the needs of Latino communities and training and supporting Latino community leaders to cultivate grassroots involvement for positive change. Cultivando coordinates a summer lunch program in Westminster, increasing participation of
Latino families by building inclusivity and participation at recreation centers, and distributing meals to children. This organization is also very active throughout Adams County in bringing resources to reduce educational disparities for minority communities.

Community leadership in Westminster neighborhoods has also contributed to equitable and inclusive action by the City. The Westminster Garden, the city's first public community garden, was created in response to requests by the Hmong community. This was a collaborative effort built by the city, volunteers, and neighborhood residents and features crops important to the culture of the community it serves.

The 2017 American Community Survey shows that 10.5%—11,700 persons—of the City's population have at least one disability. An even higher percentage of those over age 65 report some type of a disability, with 13% or 4,664 seniors living with a disability that likely requires particular planning for easy access to amenities. Not all disabilities are visible or related to mobility impairments, so while it is important to consider physically mobility and accessibility, it is also critical to make allowances for sensory impairments and cognitive disabilities.

Ensuring Resiliency

The Comprehensive Plan plays an important role in planning for hazards, as it establishes guiding principles and policies that recognize the influence of floodplains and topography, water supply, waste water infrastructure, and stormwater management have over land use patterns. The 2018 Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) strengthens that policy foundation to ensure resiliency and hazard mitigation is a priority for decision-makers.

The quantity and quality of water is central to the natural hazard concerns in Westminster. Drought and extreme rain events are high probabilities and high impact events for both the economy and natural ecosystems. Extreme rain events resulting in flooding have the potential to endanger a large number of people, damage or destroy critical infrastructure, businesses, and homes, as well as damage parks and open space. However, extreme snow and cold events are Westminster's most common meteorological hazard, and can equally endanger vulnerable populations, damage critical infrastructure, and impact economic activity. Climate change is also causing greater swings in weather extremes, including dryer and wetter periods and warmer and colder events. This trend makes extreme weather events a more frequent hazard vulnerability for the Front Range. Potential consequences of these natural hazards that require mitigation include:

- Degraded watersheds and water quality;
- Increased water processing costs;
- Infrastructure failure (e.g., electrical system, roads, stormwater system, water and wastewater utility systems);
- Loss of biodiversity;
- Degraded air quality;
- Endangered people and property;
- Financial setbacks, losses, and threatened economic activity; and
Drought

According to the 2018 HMP, residents with access and functional needs, the homeless, seniors, children, and the economically vulnerable are identified as highly vulnerable to the risk of hazards. Poverty, food insecurity, affordable housing, and homelessness continue to be a challenge to overall quality of life, resilience, and sense of community in Westminster. This vulnerability is exacerbated by the 32% rise in cost of living between 2001–2015, while the poverty level doubled to 9% in the past decade. Disabled individuals also run a higher risk of vulnerability to natural hazards, and approximately 12.5% of residents cope with some form of disability (i.e. mobility, cognitive, sensory, independent living, and self-care).

Emergency and disaster preparedness efforts must ensure these populations are provided equal access and reasonable accommodation. The increasing probability of weather extremes must also influence building and site design, land use patterns, and key infrastructure design and placement. Based on the 2017 business survey, more than 75% of businesses did not have a contingency plan in place for disaster events. Westminster’s Business Development Team is working on an approach to increase awareness about the need for businesses to have a plan in place before an event, as well as strategies to address economic resiliency. Westminster’s economic and social resilience is strongly dependent on the natural and physical environment and the City’s responses to maintaining and enhancing those resources.

Sustainability: Be one of the most sustainable cities.

Sustainability and sustainable site design are an important part of the City’s 2013 Comprehensive Plan and current Strategic Plan. Westminster’s working definition of sustainability is an economically strong, socially vibrant, and environmentally healthy community for current and future generations. A commitment to sustainability will enhance quality of life and community resilience, generate economic growth, and create equitable access to services for the entire Westminster community. Sustainability metrics in land development regulations typically address energy and water use, environmental protection, infrastructure, food access, economic development, and fiscal management. Westminster’s emphasis is to create a sustainable community where people can live, work, play, and visit. The City is also in the process of preparing its first citywide sustainability plan concurrent with the Comprehensive Plan process. This project will build sustainability principles into city programs, projects, standards and operations.

A State of Sustainability Report was released in January 2019. Similar to this Existing Conditions Snapshot, it describes existing programs and precedents in Westminster, establishing baseline conditions and identifying new opportunities to advance sustainability in Westminster organized around 11 topic areas. The topic areas include:

a. Communication and Outreach
b. Energy
c. Food and health
d. Homes and neighborhoods
e. Jobs and businesses
f. Land and growth
g. Mobility
h. Parks, Arts and Culture
i. Safety
j. Waste and Materials
k. Water

Three cross-cutting themes are also identified in the *State of Sustainability Report*: resiliency, equity, and growth management as the focus throughout the Sustainability Plan process, especially as they relate to topic-based programs, initiatives and opportunities. Extensive coordination will occur among the multiple “Westminster Forward” planning efforts to ensure plan alignment and integrated strategies to move Westminster forward in a sustainable direction.
Housing + Neighborhoods

Westminster has a range of neighborhood types and scales that offer a variety of living environments, housing types, and levels of affordability. The 2013 Comprehensive Plan sought to maintain the quality and variety of existing neighborhoods, create high quality, cohesive new neighborhoods, and emphasize connectivity of existing and new neighborhoods to amenities and services. An increasing proportion of housing will need to meet the changing demands for smaller, multifamily, multigenerational, or specialized units, and to address affordable housing in the region.

Architectural and site design are also important aspects of neighborhood quality, in which residents have an incredible amount of pride. This is in part due to continuity of established neighborhoods, but also because of the City’s emphasis on design guidelines and development standards that foster livability and a high quality of life in neighborhoods.

Be a regional leader for affordable housing

Although there are two active housing authorities in Westminster—Adams County (Unison Housing Partners) and Jefferson County (JCHA)—it still remains important for the City to invest in planning for economic mobility, social equity, increased community investment, improved sustainability, and maintaining the desirability of Westminster. As rents and home prices have increased and demographics and housing needs change, the City will need to be prepared to respond with actions that serve its residents. According to the 2017 Housing Needs Assessment, the future of housing in Westminster will be heavily influenced by formation of households by millennials, retirement, and aging baby boomers, shifts in housing composition and employment growth, and relative affordability compared to the Denver Metro region.

As a result, Westminster has made an increased commitment to invest in housing. The City recently completed an Affordable and Workforce Housing Strategic Plan in 2017. This plan outlines policies with strategies and action items to work toward meeting current and future needs for renters, homeowners, and vulnerable populations.

Current conditions and housing needs for renters, homeowners, and senior and disabled populations lay the foundation for Westminster’s approach to addressing these issues into the future. Over half of the city’s housing is owner-occupied, and 81% of owners live in detached units while 77% of renters live in attached units. Geographically, there are often higher percentages of rental units in redeveloped areas and denser neighborhoods. Figure 3 illustrate the percent of dwelling units that are rented compared to owner occupied by census block group. The maps show a gradual increase in the percent of renter occupied units especially west of US 36, north of Stanley Lake, and in the north central area of the city. There are no areas where the percent of renter occupied homes has decreased since 2000.
Renters are carrying a greater cost burden than homeowners with a 47% increase in median rent from 2010 to 2015. While costs are universally rising, the income gap between renters and owners is significant. From 2000 to 2015, the income of homeowners increased by 37% compared to 12% for renters, and renters living in poverty increased by 53% over the same time frame.
Table 1. Average Household Income for Westminster Owners and Renters

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Source: 2017 City of Westminster Housing Needs Assessment

Cost burdens are not falling only to renters; home values increased citywide by 38% between 2005 and 2016. Purchasing power was lost by homeowners and renters alike from 2011 to 2015—a continuing trend since 2000—as incomes have not kept pace with sale prices and rental costs. Data shows a continued increase between 2010 and 2016 in percent of households earning $75,000+ from 39.5% to 46.4%, as well as in median household income from $61,936 to $69,805. While this is a positive trend, the increase in income required to afford the change in median sale price is 10% below the necessary 24% income increase to meet median sale price. Coupled with the decline in inventory since 2005, the ability for residents in Westminster to become homeowners has dropped. Westminster is representative of nationwide trends, so these conditions are unlikely to reverse or change any time soon.

The lack of affordable housing is generally having a greater impact on lower-income residents than those making the median income. Because of falling interest rates and raising construction costs, affordability increased in almost every part of the city between 2000 and 2015. These conditions make it particularly difficult for a low-income renter to find a home to buy in today's market.

Figure 5. Affordability of Current Housing Stock

A Housing Task Force, made up of industry professionals, housing advocates, and elected leaders, was used to guide development of the Affordable and Workforce Housing Strategic Plan. Many issues identified in the plan touched on the City's development and design requirements. In addition to considerations for the Comprehensive Plan, specific development requirements need to be revisited to allow attainment of this goal. Issues with current standards identified include...
prioritization of material standards over high efficiency and durability, excessive parking ratios and setbacks, prohibitions on accessory dwelling units, and landscape standards that are not compatible with the nature of the local climate. For consideration with all types of housing, it is further noted that current standards are oriented to large sites and not conducive to 10- to 15-acre infill sites that dominate remaining land inventory in Westminster, and the current standards do not facilitate repurposing declining retail/commercial properties for other types of development.

Approaches to consider in the upcoming Development Code rewrite include flexibility with materials to help meet sustainability goals, parking and setback reductions based on context—for example, adjacent to transit, provisions to allow accessory dwelling units and refinement of the landscape requirements.

One of the ways that affordable housing was recommended to be increased in the Affordable and Workforce Housing Strategic Plan was with an allowance for accessory dwelling units (ADUs). This provision would have a manageable impact on resources, especially when recognizing that they would have to be approved by Homeowners Associations where applicable, which might limit their occurrence. Appropriate standards for accessory dwelling units would be necessary to garner support, and more outreach must still occur. But provision of ADUs could supplement solutions for multigenerational housing and a continuum of care for seniors, for which demand is increasing.

Distinct Neighborhood Pride

Westminster’s residential communities include a variety of housing and neighborhoods, from apartments and starter homes, to older and historic neighborhoods, to new urbanism and mixed-use communities. The continuity of established neighborhoods, emphasis on design guidelines and development standards that have created a high quality of life and livability, and high levels of community participation have all contributed to the great amount of pride residents have in their neighborhoods.

The city is primarily comprised of established and older neighborhoods with a strong history; nearly 87% of Westminster homes were built before the year 2000. Most neighborhoods in Westminster were created through a Planned Unit Development (PUD) process. This provides developers more flexibility in housing and neighborhood design if they choose. The Preliminary Development Plan (PDP) is the regulating plan for land uses, circulation, amenities, parks and more, and establishes neighborhood design elements to create the sense of community that have created the unique neighborhoods throughout the city. These include:

- Amenities and community gathering locations;
- Design Standards;
- Robust Landscaping Requirements;
- Streetscape Requirements;
- Views; and
- Identity promotion through monuments, public art, and/or retention of historic sites.
The City created the Traditional Mixed Use Neighborhood Development (TMUND) designation as an option for new neighborhoods to incorporate a mix of housing types, parks and community facilities as well as a neighborhood focal point. Integration of access to and location of amenities are also included in the design of new residential neighborhoods. Bradburn Village is the most well-known TMUND development in Westminster.

The high level of engagement of neighborhoods also creates the community cohesion residents appreciate. Throughout Westminster’s neighborhoods, there are 133 registered Homeowners Associations (HOAs) and various neighborhood organizations.
Mobility + Connectivity

The quality and experience of how people navigate the city is one of the most significant factors in planning for current and future growth and associated mobility needs. The city’s streets can play multiple roles—as major thoroughfares that handle significant traffic through the city, as bicycle routes for commuters to employment or transit stations, or as places to stroll or even linger as pedestrians. Land use patterns throughout the Denver Metro Region have largely resulted in car-dependent communities, but recent and long-term investments in transit and multimodal infrastructure indicate that land use patterns and travel preferences are changing.

Transportation Trends

On a typical work day, approximately 79% of Westminster residents who work drive alone to their employment; another 9% carpool and 4% take transit. Approximately 1% walk, 1% bike, and another 6% work from home. Nearly 38,000 residents of other communities in the Metro Region commute into Westminster for employment, while nearly 50,000 Westminster residents leave for employment in other communities such as Boulder and downtown Denver. Approximately 5,200 people both live and work in Westminster. In 2017, approximately 2% of Westminster residents did not have access to a vehicle. These residents rely on others to carpool or depend on alternative modes of transportation for daily necessities and errands.

Figure 7. Means of Transportation to Work

Source: 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
Increasing traffic and congestion continues to be an issue for the Denver Metro Region, and Westminster is no exception; average travel times to work increased from 25.4 to 27.1 minutes between 2010 and 2017. Limited funds also contribute to the need for a multimodal system as the gas tax rate has not increased in over 25 years and does not cover the cost of transportation infrastructure needs. The City will continue to focus on the efficacy of the roadway network, ensuring people can access regional transportation corridors, activity centers, and employment centers easily by car, by transit, and by walking and rolling (such as on bike and other micro-mobility devices like scooters).

**Connectivity and Safety**

*Bicycles, Trails and Pedestrian Circulation*

As Westminster's population increases and growth continues, biking and walking will become increasingly more relevant as travel modes, particularly to connect to transit stations, employment, and local neighborhood centers. Westminster's bicycle and pedestrian networks are part of the overall structure of the city, which includes a significant network of shared-use bicycle and pedestrian trail facilities integrated into parks, open space, and urban development.

*Bicycle Circulation and Trails*

The City of Westminster is an active community that uses bicycle facilities and shared use trails both on- and off-street. These facilities are used for both passive and active recreation use, as well as for commuting to employment areas. Within Westminster, 50 individual trails connect 150 miles of multi-use trails. Within the system, 5 regional trails have been established along ditches and
canals preserved as wildlife corridors. While Westminster has a strong bicycle path system, the on-street network includes only 17 miles of bicycle lanes.

The City completed the 2030 Westminster Bicycle Master Plan (BMP) in 2010 in response to demand to extend the bicycle network for both greater connectivity and to accommodate commuter bicycling. The BMP provides direction for expansion of this network, with the goal to provide bikeways on 28% of the roadway network. Key future improvements include 46 miles of bike lanes within the city and connections to the US 36 Bikeway. The plan also emphasizes connections to transit and key destinations throughout the city.

Westminster has also developed the Bikeway Network Wayfinding and Signing Plan, along with a Bicycle Parking Plan, to continue planning for the improved safety and operation of the bicycle network, signage and wayfinding, and short- and long-term bicycle parking facilities. The success of these plans is being realized through plans to add bike facilities to 23 streets in 2018.

**Pedestrian Circulation**

Existing pedestrian facilities in the city include sidewalks, paths, trails, pedestrian bridges, pedestrian/trail underpasses and crosswalks. Sidewalks are located on both sides of the street throughout most of the city with a few exceptions.

As a measure of how easy it is to get around by walking, a national metric called Walk Score® has been developed. Communities are scored from 0 to 100; the higher the score, the easier it is to get around a community on foot. Originally created for real estate purposes, Walk Score® can also be used to assess a community’s overall walkability. The calculation awards points based on the distance to the closest amenities, including businesses, parks, theaters, schools, and other common destinations. Westminster has a Walk Score of 37. Similarly, Bike Score® and Transit Score® indicate the ease a traveler can bike around a community and take transit. Figure 8 and Figure 9 show Westminster’s walkability, bikeability, and transit access scores relative to other local municipalities and for the neighborhoods within Westminster. Westminster’s scores are about equal or exceed neighboring communities except for Denver.

Westminster has an extensive trail system augmented by connections to and through neighborhoods, shopping centers, parks, schools, and employment areas. Over the past 20 years, the City has made infrastructure investments and put requirements in place to create a safe, pleasant environment for pedestrians. Connectivity along the pedestrian and bicycle network is facilitated by 40 underpasses that circumvent the need to cross major arterial roadways at grade, and wide sidewalks and landscaped areas buffering pedestrians from auto traffic.

As new development occurs, safe and accessible pedestrian connections will be emphasized in areas with access to transit, parks or open space facilities, neighborhood services, and major activity centers. Improvements to existing facilities will continue to be pursued along with strategic pedestrian underpasses as funding is available and development occurs.
Figure 9. Walk Scores, Transit Scores, and Bike Scores by Municipality

Figure 10. Walk Scores, Transit Scores, and Bike Scores by Westminster Neighborhood

Source: https://www.walkscore.com/
Transit
Within Westminster, the Regional Transportation District (RTD) provides existing and planned local and regional bus and rail transit service. In addition to the existing local service, several major regional transit improvements have been implemented in Westminster over the past five years, increasing Westminster's connectivity to major destinations and other communities in the Denver Metro Region.

Bus Service
The primary form of transit service in the city is RTD bus service on local streets and major highways. RTD runs 17 bus routes servicing many neighborhoods and three Park-n-Rides in Westminster, including both express lines that run along US 36 and I-25 and local routes that run along major arterials through the city. These routes connect Westminster with Denver and Boulder, as well as surrounding communities. RTD transit service also provides direct access to Denver International Airport from the Wagon Road and Westminster Center Park-n-Rides.

The Flatiron Flyer bus rapid transit (BRT) service opened in 2016 providing service between Denver, Westminster, Broomfield, Louisville, Superior, and Boulder along US 36. Two Flatiron Flyer stations serve Westminster: US 36 and Church Ranch, and US 36 and Sheridan. Five of the seven Flatiron Flyer routes benefit Westminster residents, running every 15 minutes all day. Since opening in 2016, ridership has continually increased for the entire Flatiron Flyer line, making it the third most popular bus line within the RTD system in 2017 (Source: RTD's 2017 Boardings Data).

In addition to the local and regional bus service, RTD and Jefferson and Adams counties provide Access-a-Ride services for people with disabilities. RTD also provides Call-n-Ride services (FlexRide) in portions of Westminster, providing connections among transit stations, Park-n-Rides, and destinations such as shopping centers, businesses, and schools.

Commuter Rail
In addition to the regional bus service provided by the Flatiron Flyer, the B-Line commuter rail line transports riders from Westminster Station to Union Station providing access to major employers and connections to C, E, and W light rail lines, the University of Colorado A-Line to Denver International Airport, as well as local and regional bus routes. The Westminster Station is located in the southern part of the city and offers 350 parking spaces and 20 bike lockers. Between 2016 and 2017, the B-Line reduced travel time between Westminster and Denver from 34 to 12 minutes and has an increasing average daily ridership from 1,500 to 1,800 people per day. Potential future stations in the city are planned for 88th Avenue adjacent to downtown Westminster, as well as at Church Ranch north of the Shops at Walnut Creek.

Transit Facilities and Passenger Amenities
Westminster Station is one of the most active facilities along the US 36 RTD corridor with more than 2,500 people using regional service and 850 people accessing local bus service daily. The City continues to work collaboratively with RTD to ensure that adequate service, route additions or modifications, and facility improvements are provided in conjunction with new development. The
City is also working with RTD to address existing deficiencies such as improving lighting at stops, increasing signage and wayfinding, and adding real-time traveler information.

Table 1 identifies the amenities at the three Park-n-Rides located in the city: Church Ranch, Westminster Station, and Wagon Road.

Table 2. Park-n-Ride Amenities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amenities</th>
<th>US 36 and Church Ranch Blvd.</th>
<th>US 36 and Sheridan Station</th>
<th>Westminster Station</th>
<th>Wagon Road</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parking Spaces</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>1,310</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>1,540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking Utilization</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bike Racks</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bike Lockers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus Routes</td>
<td>FF1, FF3, 104</td>
<td>31, 51, 92, 100, 104, FF1, FF3, FF5, FF6, FF7</td>
<td>31, 72</td>
<td>8, 12, 120, 120X, 122X, 128, AA FlexRide: Thornton SportsRides: BroncosRide, BuffRide, CU vs CSU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rail Lines</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>B Line</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Emerging Technologies

New transportation technologies are advancing quickly, with technological innovations in vehicles, the transportation network, and interactions between the two. Some advanced technologies are already seeing widespread implementation to improve safety and traffic flow in the Denver Metro Region. Although the specific forms and timing of emerging transportation technologies will vary and cannot be predicted with certainty, innovations with the potential to dramatically influence transportation are certainly on the horizon. How communities plan for emerging technologies will continue to fundamentally change the transportation landscape. Like all communities, Westminster should actively monitor these technologies because changes are rapidly occurring requiring communities to be nimble and open to potential changes.

Mobility as a Service

The ability to easily schedule and coordinate trips via carpooling, vanpooling, transit, taxi, ride sourcing, car share, bike share, and other modes is rapidly changing the way people travel, which may result in a decrease in dependency on single occupancy vehicles and auto ownership. Ride sourcing services such as Uber and Lyft currently service Westminster. An average ride between Westminster and Union Station (Denver) costs $12-$15 and an average ride between Westminster
and Denver International Airport costs $30-$35. Westminster likely has a stronger tendency toward this trend than other communities because of its proximity to the US 36 corridor, and reasonable distances to destinations such as downtown Denver, Denver International Airport, and downtown Boulder.

*Connected and Autonomous Vehicles*

Connected vehicles (CVs) and autonomous vehicles (AVs) present an uncertain future for communities. These technologies include vehicle-to-vehicle (V2V), vehicle-to-infrastructure (V2I) communications, and/or AV communications. It is unknown whether key indicators such as vehicle miles traveled, congestion, fuel consumption, and safety will increase or decrease with the onset of these technologies. Westminster should assume that CVs and AVs will be a part of the future transportation network and continue to follow local, regional, and national policy trends as they relate to CV and AV use and policies.

CVs, AVs, and ride sharing services could change the way street frontage is used. Westminster should continue to monitor parking and curbside drop-off/pick-up needs as travel patterns change. It may be necessary to transition on-street parking and/or parking spots within developments and at transit stations to curbside drop-off locations as pick-up and drop-off behavior changes.

*Electric and Other Alternative Fuels*

Alternative fuel (especially electric) vehicles are becoming more common due to US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provisions designed to reduce US dependence on petroleum by accelerating the introduction of alternative fuel vehicles. Colorado Governor Jared Polis has also signed an executive order to support the state’s transition to zero emission vehicles. The state offers a $5,000 tax credit for passenger electric vehicles. Westminster should continue to monitor EPA and state regulations as they consider expansion of vehicle charging stations. The city may consider using public-private partnerships to expand a network of charging stations throughout the city. Primary locations would include city locations such as libraries, recreation centers, and transit stations.

Westminster recently received a grant from the Regional Air Quality Council (RAQC) to install charging stations through a Charge Ahead Colorado grant. Residents and visitors can charge their electric vehicles at the Downtown Westminster (8855 Eaton Street) and Westminster Station (72nd Avenue and Federal Boulevard) parking garages. There are over 10 additional charging stations located at destinations such as shopping centers and the Adams County Human Services Center.
Land Use + Growth

Westminster is unique in that the Comprehensive Plan is used as a regulatory document. Through a combination of planning tools— including a mix of Planned Unit Development (PUD) and other zone designations, land use plan, design guidelines, and Specific Plans for focus areas— the City strives to ensure complementary and supportive uses to create a sustainable, high-quality living environment for residents and businesses. The 2013 Comprehensive Plan provided the foundation for mixed-use development within the city that is conveniently accessed by all modes of transportation, as well as a range of employment uses. Through the land use framework, new land use designations were added or modified to provide opportunity for higher-density residential and mixed-use development (both standalone and transit-oriented), greater specificity and direction for employment uses, and service commercial and light industrial uses.

Existing Land Use Context

Open space, parks and recreational amenities are a prominent feature of the city’s physical landscape and the city’s land use pattern is generally influenced by major regional transportation corridors. For the most part, retail, hotel and employment uses are clustered along US 36 and I-25 around major interchanges. Outside of these corridors, uses are primarily residential, with parks and open spaces integrated throughout. Smaller- and medium-scale commercial uses are located along arterial streets in the city, like Wadsworth Parkway, 120th Avenue, Sheridan Boulevard, Federal Boulevard and 72nd Avenue. South of 80th Avenue, in the oldest portion of the city, the use pattern is more diverse, particularly south of 72nd Avenue where commercial and light industrial uses are focused. As a whole, however, the city maintains a diverse array of uses.

Of the total land area in the city, public open space, parks, golf courses and conservation areas comprise over 36%—more than any other land use in the city. Private parks and open space comprise another 2%. These areas are interspersed throughout the city, creating multiple continuous natural and creek corridors that traverse Westminster. A similar proportion of land is residential, accounting for another 38% of land area with the majority being low density. Once land is committed to residential use, it is very unlikely to change, which makes the density for remaining residential land extremely important.

Commercial retail and service uses occupy 6% of the land area, with the remaining land area comprised of 6% public/institutional uses, 3% office, 1.5% industrial, 0.02% mixed-use, and 7% vacant. Retail uses and office/employment uses are focused in specific areas:

**Commercial Retail Uses**
- North I-25 Area
- 120th/Sheridan
- Walnut Creek
- Sheridan/72nd
- Wadsworth/104th

**Office/Employment Uses**
- Federal/104th
- Brookhill
- Federal/72nd
- Sheridan/72nd
- Park Centre/ Park 1200 Area
- Westmoor/ Ball
- Circlepoint
- Sheridan Park
Future retail will also be focused in the primary redevelopment areas of Downtown and Westminster Station in mixed-use environments and the surrounding areas as well. There are very few lands designated for industrial use and the parcels are generally small and have fractured ownership.

Figure 12 identifies projected distribution of future land uses, as envisioned in the 2013 Comprehensive Plan. Compared to the existing 2018 land uses identified above, the amount of existing residential land is slightly above the planned 31% while the amount of existing Mixed Use is significantly behind the planned 4.6%—this trend is partially due to the current market cycle being heavily focused on high density residential development and industrial/flex uses.

Source: Westminster City GIS data 2018
In discussion with stakeholders and economic development experts existing office designations do not allow for the type of “flex” spaces that are desired by small start-up companies. Such companies turn to the type of spaces allowed within the “Flex/Light Industrial” category rather than one of the established Office/R&D land use categories. This approach is problematic mainly due to the lack of available sites in the city designated for Flex/Light Industrial use and the fragmented locations and ownership of the few remaining Flex/Light Industrial properties. Meanwhile office employers have increasingly identified amenity-laden, transit accessible urban environments as preferred locations, as opposed to the low-rise suburban office environment that dominated previous office development in Westminster and the US 36 corridor between Denver and Boulder. The current land use plan thus appears to not align with the market trends.

Other land use discrepancies include more Retail Commercial and Service Commercial than planned. Since sales tax is the largest source of municipal revenue, the changing retail environment is important to consider. The 2013 Comprehensive Plan anticipated a shrinking need for retail space, reducing the amount of land planned for retail commercial uses from 5% of the City’s land area to 3.8%. For example, redevelopment of the former Westminster Mall site will result in less retail space at build out than the previous mall. Despite this anticipated retraction, the pace and amount of declining retail space has exceeded expectations. Other retail challenges have included the expansion of additional restaurant uses into retail centers which has also challenged the water supply, as well as having sewer impacts. A finer grained approach to the City’s remaining retail areas would improve infrastructure planning and provide better direction for those seeking to redevelop retail centers.

Of the 34 square miles of land area, 7% is currently vacant. The majority of vacant land is located along major corridors like US 36, Wadsworth Parkway, and I-25, and present opportunities for the City to continue to diversify its land use mix and define its character through gateway features along these heavily trafficked highways. The most significant vacant parcels are located in North I-25 (250 acres), Pillar of Fire (158 acres), Hawn Hewit (103 acres) and in Westmoor (96 acres) and Ball (90 acres). Recent developments have occurred at Park 1200, Orchard Town Center, and the Promenade area. Annexation opportunities also exist in “Sphere of Influence” areas located mainly to the south of the city and a few primarily residential enclaves in Jefferson and Adams Counties. Sphere of influence areas consist of 1,118 acres with 588 located in Jefferson County and the remainder in Adams County.

**Development Process**

Westminster’s development and PUD processes and their relationship to the Comprehensive Plan create a flexible approach to development, but one that sometimes results in confusion or uncertainty. The City uses land use designations as tools to define the City’s vision and intent for development. Since the city is primarily zoned PUD, more specific uses are delineated as part of the approval process and must be consistent with the land use designation in the Comprehensive Plan. Specific Plan Districts (SPDs) are another mechanism to regulate land uses and development within focus areas, defined as such in the Comprehensive Plan. This designation is used for areas of
the city with a Specific Plan that have uniquely important development or redevelopment opportunities for the benefit of the city. For parcels not zoned PUD or SPD, the Municipal Code provides detail on specific uses permitted within each zoning district. However, the Code outlines these permitted uses in such a way as to be applicable to a larger site, thus necessitating a rezoning to PUD. Under this structure, the Comprehensive Plan is a regulatory document. This means all development must be in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan whether zoned PUD, Specific Plan District, or a conventional individual zoned district.

**Development Potential**

Projected development potential of the Comprehensive Plan assumes that the majority of vacant lands and sites with opportunity for redevelopment, infill or intensification, will develop over the 20-year Plan horizon by 2040. However, the Plan is not intended to specify or anticipate when this development potential will actually be realized; nor does the designation of a site for a certain use necessarily mean that the site will be built/redeveloped with that use in the next 20 years. Further, the City’s Public Works & Utilities Department identified $1 billion in new infrastructure necessary to realize build out of the 2013 Comprehensive Plan.

Total population by the 2040 Plan horizon is expected to grow by approximately 22% to 137,384—an increase of approximately 24,500 new residents. Employment in the city will also grow substantially, with the potential for 61,000 employees in the city by 2040. This could increase the existing job base in the city by approximately 28%.

**Redevelopment**

**Urban Renewal Areas**

In addition to vacant parcels, sites with opportunity for redevelopment, infill, or intensifications also have development potential. The City currently has seven active officially designated Urban Renewal Areas. These Urban Renewal Areas are administered by the Westminster Economic Development Authority (WEDA), for which City Council members serve as the Board Members.

![Figure 1. Vacant Parcels and Urban Renewal Areas](source: Westminster GIS data 2018)
The Urban Renewal Area designation allows WEDA to finance capital improvements and land assembly to incentivize redevelopment and improve physical conditions in key areas of the city. WEDA generally gains its revenues from increases in property taxes within these areas through a 25-year window. Within the redevelopment project areas, WEDA can spend revenues on capital improvements to the “public realm”; those areas and elements that serve a public purpose, including parks, plazas, utilities and roads, landscaping, and parking.

The seven redevelopment areas include:

- South Westminster, the tax increment expired in 2017.
- Downtown Westminster, adopted in 2009 and will be active for 25 years from the date tax increment collection is established.
- Westminster Center East Sub-Area, adopted in 2002 and active through 2027.
- Mandalay, adopted in 2003 and active through 2027.
- North Huron, adopted in 2004 and active through 2028.
- Holly Park, adopted in 2004 and active through 2028.
- South Sheridan, adopted in 2004 and active through 2028.

There are several key redevelopment and infill opportunities in the city. Seven of these sites were identified through the comprehensive planning process as opportunities for possible future land use changes and site-specific planning. These areas generally encompass the remaining large vacant lots in the city, and their existing development may or may not redevelop over the Plan horizon. Further details and analysis of these areas can be found in the Character Area Profiles (under separate cover).
Economic + Financial Resilience

Resilient Local Economy

The intent of the City’s economic development strategy is to strengthen and grow Westminster’s employment base, support retail business, and foster redevelopment. A diversified economy of retail, office, manufacturing, and services to support business growth and development and adaptability of the city’s economic base is critical to long-term success and resiliency. The City provides a healthy environment for business development—and the amenity structure, range of housing types, and services to foster the full business life cycle, nurturing business to grow in place within Westminster. However, a balanced local economy is more than just jobs; ensuring high-quality amenities, transit access and diverse housing options is increasingly a factor in attracting and retaining top talent as employer and worker preferences continue to evolve.

The City’s most recent economic development paradigm goes beyond promoting employers but more broadly considers how to foster a climate for business development in Westminster including workforce and education, creating environments for unique experiences such as Downtown Westminster, affordable and workforce housing and sustainability considerations. The existing Comprehensive Plan does not fully address this paradigm.

Growth of the Economic Base

Since 1999, the city has experienced a significant amount of growth, despite the 2008 recession. There are over 4,000 businesses located in Westminster. The business community includes small family-owned companies, service companies, and high-tech manufacturers, as well as national and international headquarters. The city’s strongest growth has been in the Aerospace, Business Support Services, Financial Services, Health and Life Sciences, Hospitality and Entertainment, and Technology and Information industries, creating nearly 8,000 total new jobs between 2011 and 2016. These six industry clusters employ more than 34,110 employees in almost 4,440 companies, representing 67.7% of all employment and 67.5% of all businesses in the City of Westminster (Source: Industry Base Report 2017). Given the importance of these six industries to the city’s economic base, they should play a key role in the City’s business recruitment and retention program.

Jobs to Resident Balance

The US 36 corridor works as a regional economic system and for communities located between Boulder and Denver, like Westminster, there is often a disconnect between the residents and the jobs within the community. The relationship between jobs and employed residents is a reflection of whether a city has a deficit or surplus of jobs relative to employed residents. A balance between the two would be a 1:1 ratio, and would indicate that in-commuting and out-commuting are matched, leading to efficient use of the transportation system, particularly during peak hours. As of 2016, the city’s ratio is an estimated 0.86 jobs to employed residents (reflecting approximately 47,684 jobs and 59,194 employed residents in the city). In comparison, both Adams and Jefferson counties had ratios hovering at around 0.90, with Denver significantly higher with 1.37 jobs to employed residents. While the jobs to employed residents ratio appears stable in terms of total
numbers, almost 9 out of 10 jobs in Westminster are held by non-residents. Fewer than 12% of employed Westminster residents hold jobs within the city, and the remaining 88% of working residents travel outside of the city for work.

Table 3. Regional Comparison of Jobs to Employed Residents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of Comparison</th>
<th>Jobs</th>
<th>Employed Residents</th>
<th>Jobs/Emp. Residents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City of Westminster</td>
<td>51,108</td>
<td>59,194</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Arvada</td>
<td>29,935</td>
<td>60,208</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Broomfield (City &amp; County)</td>
<td>35,820</td>
<td>32,938</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Thornton</td>
<td>27,021</td>
<td>66,839</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denver (City &amp; County)</td>
<td>486,370</td>
<td>353,976</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adams County</td>
<td>200,807</td>
<td>224,062</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson County</td>
<td>227,837</td>
<td>261,358</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DRCOG 2016 estimates for jobs; American Community Survey 2016 5-yr estimates for Employed Residents

The existing Comprehensive Plan establishes a goal of improving jobs-employed resident balance by increasing the amount of employment in the city. The 2013 plan relied on the land use element to accomplish this: increasing the City’s land area dedicated for office use from 2.2% to 5% and increasing flex/light industrial land from 1.4% to 2.1% as identified in the “Existing Land Use Context” section above in this report.

Economic Development Strategy

The City established the Economic Development Office in 1991, with the mission to create and maintain a vital and sustainable economy through attracting, retaining, and expanding business, promoting the city and preparing for the future business development needs of the city. Since 1991, the City’s economic development efforts have specifically focused on diversification and growth in the retail sector, while also emphasizing growth in primary employment sectors. To attract and retain this economic growth, Westminster offers a variety of incentives and financing options.

In support of small business, city grants and scholarships are available for businesses with less than 50 employees. These include capital project grants and the Facelift Program, which provides a reimbursement for improvements to façade and landscaping. Other forms of financial assistance are accomplished through Economic Development Agreements (EDAs) that offer rebates on fees and taxes, and the Enterprise Zone Program which offers state income tax credits to incentivize businesses to locate and develop in qualifying economically distressed areas of Adams and Jefferson Counties.

As of early 2019, Westminster also has three Opportunity Zones: Downtown Westminster, Historic Westminster, and Westminster Station TOD. Opportunity Zones are a tool enabled as part of the 2017 tax reform package (Tax Cuts and Jobs Act), which is designed to encourage private capital investment in targeted areas of a community. The program is essentially a federal tax incentive to invest in low-income communities through the deferral, reduction and potential elimination of
certain federal capital gains taxes. In Westminster, Opportunity Zones could help fund the
development of affordable housing, new infrastructure, or other capital improvements.

As a result of the city’s significant economic growth over the past decade, the city has a strong
base for continued growth that is attracting more amenities such as local and national restaurants,
hotels, and shopping and entertainment experiences. Notable companies like Ball Aerospace,
Maxar, Zimmer Biomet, and Alliance Data are locating to the city or expanding, and additional
opportunities still remain in redevelopment areas and focus areas.

Outdoors, Wellness, and Literacy

Embrace the Outdoors

Parks, recreation, and open space are vital elements of Westminster’s high quality of life. They
provide physical relief to urbanization, opportunities for leisure and activity, and preservation of
environmentally valuable habitats and landscapes. The City and its inhabitants take pride in the
quality and extent of parks, community facilities, and open space that comprise the city’s physical
landscape. Westminster’s Parks, Recreation, and Libraries Department is a three-time winner of
the prestigious National Recreation and Parks Association Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Park
and Recreation Management.

Over the past 50 years, the City has acquired or built seven award-winning recreation facilities,
over 50 parks including the 205-acre City Park, two new libraries, two championship golf courses,
an extensive 150-mile trail system and 3,100 acres of open space throughout the community. As of
2019, this system of parks, recreation and open space occupies approximately 38% of the city’s land
area. This is significantly higher than the neighboring communities of Arvada and Thornton at 21%
and 11% respectively, and similar to Broomfield at 34%.

As a result, most residents can easily access the city’s network of trails, parks and open spaces
within a ten-minute, or half-mile walk. In fact, the Big Dry Creek Trail, one of the most popular trails
in the system, is used by an estimated 100,000 people annually. Likewise, recreational, learning and
library services are also a key component of city life. In 2015, over 406,434 patrons visited the
Westminster library facilities and over 103,000 people participated in recreation classes.

As the city becomes more densely developed, there will be significantly fewer opportunities to
physically expand the park and open space network. Instead, parks and recreation planning will
emphasize optimizing the use of the city’s existing parks, recreation facilities and open spaces.
Planning will be focused on improving access, maintaining and improving existing facilities, and
enhancing the quality and number of active recreation opportunities in the city. Additionally, the
City will identify opportunities for providing high quality, well-designed parks and plazas to serve
new residents in higher-intensity, mixed-use urban environments like downtown Westminster and
the Westminster Station Area.

Parks and recreation facilities provide opportunities for leisure, informal sports and gathering as
well as formal recreation, sports activities and programs. Well-designed park spaces can
contribute significantly to a city's identity and sense of place. However, these spaces must be accessible, safe and well-maintained, and must meet the needs of the city's changing demographics, activity trends and expectations for quality programming. As Westminster shifts its focus from expansion to maintenance of the city's parks, recreation facilities and open space, these elements of design and function will be increasingly more significant.

Parks and Recreation

The City currently maintains and operates 55 neighborhood, community and citywide parks, ranging in size from 1.4 to 200 acres and comprising 2,910 acres in total. The City also owns 60 acres of undeveloped parkland. In addition to the City's neighborhood and community parks, the City operates the 2,321-acre Standley Lake Regional Park and multiple recreation and sports facilities. The Parks, Recreation, and Libraries Department's mission for delivering exceptional services focuses on nature, wellness, and literacy. A major element of the parks and recreation system is the programming of sports and activities for youth, adults, and families.

Key program areas include wellness, outdoor, educational enrichment, swimming, and sports activities. Parks and community facilities are classified based on size, function and characteristics. Aside from the Standley Lake Regional Park, located at the western edge of the city, the majority of park space in the city is classified as neighborhood and community parks. These parks are an integral part of the city's high quality of life and are utilized by approximately 75% of Westminster residents on a daily basis.

The City offers extensive and diverse programming and activities for the enjoyment of its parks by residents throughout the year. Westminster’s Parks, Recreation, and Libraries Activity Guide is an important resource to engage and involve residents in these activities and offerings, and serves as the most utilized source of information about city programs and services by residents related to these amenities. While the parks offer ample recreation opportunities through both city programs and personal activities such as walking, running, cycling, fishing, and hiking, the parks are public spaces and accommodate a variety of other cultural and educational activities and events.

Residents have the ability to rent park pavilions throughout the city, as well as take advantage of water activities at Standley Lake through paddle craft rentals and the purchase of boating permits or paddle passes. Other programmed events and activities available at the parks include educational nature hikes, workshops, and events such as Bark in the Park, and annual festivals and events hosted at city parks including the 30-year running Art in the Park event.

Park Needs and Improvements

2018 Citizen Survey reinforced the importance of providing parks and recreational opportunities to Westminster residents. Consistent with past years, 95% of residents felt beautiful parks/open spaces describes their image of the City of Westminster and selected parks and recreation related services to be among the most highly rated for quality. This includes recreation programs (87% very good or good), parks maintenance (85%), recreation facilities (84%), and trails (84%).
The City identifies sites for potential new parks as part of new and infill development. Provision of well-designed and strategically located new park space is a specific focus for the downtown Westminster and Westminster Station areas. Introduction of smaller pocket parks, squares and plazas will be focused in these higher-intensity, more urban areas in order to provide new residents a range of active and passive outdoor spaces within easy walking distance. Additional new parks and improvements to existing facilities are outlined in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Recent projects have incorporated sustainable design features including native plants, permeable pavement, and smart trash cans. Use of reclaimed water to serve the public realm is a priority for the City.

Libraries
The City operates three libraries—Irving Street Library, College Hill Library, and a small satellite library station at the West View Recreation Center. The Irving Street Library is located in South Westminster, adjacent to the Irving Street Park on Irving Street at 74th Avenue. The College Hill Library on 112th Avenue is a joint public and academic facility for the City and Front Range Community College. Together, these Libraries serve over 406,000 visitors a year. The libraries offer a variety of services in addition to media rental, including free Wi-Fi, computer access, and a variety of youth and adult services and events. With increased access and resources on the digital branch, Online Westminster Library, the City's library services reflect the ever-evolving technology and cultural needs of the Westminster community.

Westminster libraries offer diverse and popular programs for the community. “The Library’s programs and services are diverse and inclusive; one of the most popular is the Citizenship Preparation class. In 2015, more than three hundred people participated to prepare for Naturalization tests and interviews. This program and others such as One-on-One Technology Help in English and Spanish, and Job Hunt Help, truly position the Library as a community resource center.” (Westminster Public Library Master Plan 2017-2021)

Open Space and Trails
Westminster's extensive open space system is a key element of its unique setting and identity as a Front Range community. The City has made preservation and protection of natural environments and habitats a priority, integrating their conservation into the physical development of the city. As a result, Westminster’s visual landscape is rich with a variety of open spaces, trails, preserved historic sites, and scenic vistas.

The City's extensive open space system began with authorization of an open space sales tax in 1985 to purchase land for preservation and natural habitat protection, with the goal of preserving 15% of the city’s overall land area. Westminster was only the second city in Colorado to enact a sales tax for an open space acquisition program (after Boulder). As of 2013, the City successfully preserved over 14% of the its land area and began to transition efforts from acquisition to management and operations that will ensure this vital resource will be preserved and maintained into the future.
Open Space and Trails Needs and Improvements

Since 1985, the City has acquired 3,092 acres of open space to be preserved for passive recreational use and protection of natural wildlife habitat. Open space areas can be found throughout the city, but are concentrated in the city’s western area near Standley Lake and along drainage ways and irrigation ditches that cross the community, including Walnut Creek, Big Dry Creek, the Farmers’ High Line Canal and Little Dry Creek.

Existing open space provides for protection of sensitive habitat areas and wildlife movement corridors, view corridors and preservation of open and rural landscapes. Additionally, the city’s open space system provides recreation opportunities such as hiking, biking, fishing, horseback riding and nature study. Many of the City’s open spaces are linear connections that follow major creek corridors or serve as buffers between developments. These linear connections allow for an extensive network of trails that play a vital role in the city, linking neighborhoods, parks, schools and employment areas to a citywide and regional trail system. In all, Westminster currently has over 150 miles of trails.

The City’s open space and trail systems also connect to the larger regional system, particularly to the west of the city where vast areas of open space are preserved in the City of Boulder, Boulder County, Jefferson County, and the Rocky Mountain National Wildlife Refuge. Westminster’s open spaces are a major asset for the community, providing trails, wide open spaces for recreation and passive use as well as habitat for wildlife.

In 2014, the City completed the Open Space Stewardship Plan. This plan identifies priorities for land acquisition and open space management. Future acquisitions will be limited and focused on protecting view sheds, preserving unique natural areas and purchasing properties that will improve trail access throughout the city. Enhancement of the city’s open spaces will also be pursued including trail improvements and addition of educational areas in order to attract greater use of the system. However, maintenance and operations of the city’s existing open space system will be the primary focus of future iterations of this plan, particularly as use of open space and trail facilities will only increase with Westminster’s projected residential and employment population growth.

The Trails Master Plan identifies trails and connection points along the main trail corridors of Walnut Creek, Big Dry Creek, the Farmers’ High Line Canal and Little Dry Creek. This plan was last updated in 2014 and provides a basis for trail connections in both open space and new development in the city. Almost 60 miles of new trail are proposed as part of this plan. These new trail alignments include completion of the Little Dry Creek Trail and other connections to facilitate the Refuge to Refuge Trail. Improvements to the open space and trails system are outlined in these master plans.
Table 4. Westminster 2018 Trail Usage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trail</th>
<th>Total Count of Users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Big Dry Creek Trail</td>
<td>89,071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer's High Line Canal Trail</td>
<td>29,660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Floating Count)</td>
<td>44,354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Dry Creek Trail</td>
<td>43,403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standley Lake North – Greenway</td>
<td>19,263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standley Lake South – Greenway</td>
<td>30,929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walnut Creek</td>
<td>28,770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westy Hills Dog Park Car Counter</td>
<td>791,726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westy Hills Dog Park Trail Counter</td>
<td>607,859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,649,546</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Promote Culture and the Arts

Preserving and celebrating the city's cultural and historic core adds depth and authenticity to Westminster's identity in the Denver metro area. The city's evolution from the 160-acre village of DeSpain Junction to the 34 square mile city it is today represents a rich history of settlement and homesteading, ranches and orchards—some of which continues to be thematically represented in new development and retained through historic preservation efforts. Through historic preservation and promotion of the arts, Westminster is able to preserve its culture and continue to shape its identity.

Public art plays an important role in relating the story and identity of the city, and in creating opportunity for residents and visitors to participate and share in its development. Westminster boasts a variety of programs and opportunities for residents to connect with and grow the art and culture throughout Westminster, including the public art program, Adventure Pass, and Historic Westminster Art District.

Historic Preservation

Recognizing and preserving the city's past is of significant interest to the community. In 2003, the Westminster City Council established the Historic Landmark Board and adopted the Historic Preservation Ordinance. Since that time the City has been actively involved in identifying and partnering to preserve and restore many historic artifacts, buildings and property.

In 1890, the village of DeSpain Junction was renamed Harris (after real estate developer CJ Harris)—the vestiges of which are present today as the Harris Park neighborhood in the vicinity of 73rd Avenue and Bradburn Boulevard. The City officially incorporated in 1911, at which time the name was changed to Westminster, after Westminster University that was founded in 1908 and closed prematurely in 1917. As the City of Westminster expanded, other ranch and farm homesteads were folded into the city limits including the Town of Semper, Mandalay Gardens (Church Ranch), and a portion of the Westminster University (now known as the Pillar of Fire) property.
While historic preservation efforts seek to preserve the city’s past, they also promote the evolving culture of the community as the city grows and changes. For example, in Historic Westminster, the Harris Park area has seen investment by the City in preservation and restoration of historic buildings and giving recognition to artifacts, stories, and structures lost over the years. These efforts are integral to the City’s pursuit of revitalization in the historic neighborhood. The recognition of the area's history combined with historic preservation efforts has made the neighborhood an attractive location for artists to live and/or conduct business, which is having a positive impact and contributing to the revitalization of the area into a dynamic, eclectic, and diverse mixed-use neighborhood and local destination. As a means of attracting new investment and development activity in the Harris Park area, the City continues to prepare and implement planning tools to promote and facilitate such activity. Key initiatives include designation of the Historic Westminster Arts District in the area and creation of design guidelines for historically sensitive infill development and renovation.

**Public Art**
The public art program supports public art provision through a development impact fee, and has contributed more than 100 individual works of art. These can be found displayed in City Hall, city facilities, and commercial centers throughout Westminster. Some of the installations are funded through the City’s hotel/motel tax-funded Community Enhancement fund. Other methods that the City has used to acquire art have been through grant funds received from the Denver metro area Scientific and Cultural Facilities District, as well as through a city requirement enacted in 2001 stating that public art should be provided as part of all non-residential development. Westminster is one of only a handful of cities nationwide with such a program and continues its success with over 150 pieces of public art located throughout the city.

**Community Events and Participation**
The Adventure Pass is another program connecting residents with the region’s cultural and recreational attractions. This program provides free access to explore cultural and recreational attractions in the community. The library currently has contracts with the Butterfly Pavilion, Colorado State Parks, Denver Botanic Gardens, Denver Museum of Nature and Science, Dinosaur Ridge, Standley Lake Regional Park, Westminster Recreation Centers, and more. The City also works closely with local organizations and nonprofits such as Ralston House, Westminster Legacy Foundation, and Westminster Historical Society.

Outside of city programs, the designation of the Historic Westminster Art District offers events and installations of public art for the public. The Art District hosts the 2nd Saturday Art Walk each month, public art installations around the District, and pop-up events such as Imagine Westminster. A number of local organizations also host festivals and events throughout the year, with support from the City. Regular events in Westminster have become quite popular, including the LatinoFest, Movie in the Park, Westy Craft Brew Fest, Historic Westminster Summary Festival, Halloween Harvest Festival, and the Holiday Lighting Ceremony.
Utilities and Resources

Through recent and ongoing utility planning efforts, Westminster hopes to harness community input to promote water smart principles, increase sustainability planning, and improve alignment with Strategic Plan themes of inclusivity, mobility, and housing. These goals will be balanced with the need to address current market challenges while allowing enough flexibility to accommodate future market trends. Adoption of the Comprehensive Plan, Water Supply Plan, and Development Code work should occur in 2020. Upon adoption, education and training will be performed for staff, residents, and developers in their areas of focus.

The Comprehensive Plan and companion Water Supply Plan should continue to be evaluated and updated as needed, and the Development Code amended as often as needed to ensure alignment as well. To facilitate the identification of changing needs, an adaptive management framework will be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan to form a dashboard with qualitative and quantitative indicators to help reprioritize and reprogram efforts as needed.

Public Safety

Westminster is a full service city when it comes to providing public safety, unlike some of its municipal neighbors. The City provides police, fire, and medical transport services to Westminster residents, and works towards hazard preparedness and mitigation. According to the 2018 Westminster Biannual Citizen Survey, 80% of residents reported that they feel very or somewhat safe from violent crimes, and 60% reported feel very or somewhat safe from property crimes.

The Westminster Fire department responds to over 11,000 calls a year. Almost 70% of those are medical related. The remainder of calls include response to fires, alarms, hazardous materials, rescues (water, technical, etc.) and public assists. Response time is typically under six minutes.

The City of Westminster offers and supports many community safety activities and programs including National Night Out, Citizen's Police Academy, Teen Police Academy, and more. Residents can also learn about the services provided by the Westminster Fire Department and emergency services systems through the Westminster Citizens Fire Academy.

The City of Westminster's Emergency Management division provides an assortment of preparedness resources for businesses, residents, houses of worship, and schools. The City offers numerous systems to alert and notify community members about emergencies, including the Emergency Warning and Evacuation System, CodeRed emergency notifications, and Emergency Alert System. The Hazard Mitigation Plan identifies several high priority actions for implementation, including natural hazards public information booths and social media, local climate change awareness, continued floodplain land acquisition, and Clear Creek Watershed protection and wildfire mitigation.
Water Supply Planning

A State-wide water supply gap analysis was completed in 2011. Portions of the work associated with that document are being updated in 2019, but the key results of that project are still valid and important in understanding Westminster’s own water supply within the context of the State as a whole. That report identified a realistic State-wide water gap of 450,000 acre-feet (AF). The Colorado Front Range will realistically see a 320,000 AF water gap by the year 2030. For perspective, Westminster uses around 22,000 AF in a year. The Clear Creek Basin, where most of Westminster’s water originates, is already almost entirely converted to municipal use. There are no significant water supplies remaining to purchase. With water shortfalls expected State-wide and limited ability to purchase new water supplies, it is critical to ensure development occurs thoughtfully and in close coordination with water resources.

The Westminster Comprehensive Plan and Water Supply Plan are closely correlated and, further, the City’s development standards provide one of the primary implementation tools. Updates to the Comprehensive Plan, Development Code, and the Water Supply Plan will proceed concurrently in 2019-2020 to ensure these efforts are aligned to appropriately address water supply and infrastructure resources. Marrying the demand associated with development shown in the updated Comprehensive Plan to the water supply modeling efforts will result in an integrated planning document that supports thoughtful planning.

The primary goal of the Water Supply Plan is to ensure the City has reliable, high-quality water supplies available for current and future customers as the city builds out. As part of this effort, multiple development scenarios will be evaluated for the impact to water supply, to ensure that the preferred Future Land Use Plan can be successfully served by the City’s build-out water supply. Separate from the Westminster Forward project, water supply modeling will also be analyzed in conjunction with water quality models to not only ensure reliability in the quantity of water but also ensure that the water is of high quality and fully compliant with applicable regulations.

The Water Supply Plan is driven by two primary inputs: available water supply, and the amount and type of water demand on the system both today and into the future. Recently, there have been significant enhancements to the water supply model on the supply side of the equation. The model has been updated with the newest, best information available on the City’s facilities, water rights, and Clear Creek itself.

In addition to these more basic updates, the model has also been upgraded to provide critical understanding of how vulnerable the system is to varying climatic conditions. In the past, the system has been reviewed against a 67-year period of measured flow in Clear Creek. To understand resiliency, the model has been upgraded to incorporate the paleohydrology of Clear Creek that is based on a tree ring study that provides data back to the late 1500s. This gives a much longer timeframe perspective of possible wet and dry cycles that the water supply might experience in the future.
Building upon the paleohydrologic analysis, climate change models were evaluated through the water supply model. These climate models are complex and constantly refined based on improved inputs. The geographic complexities of the Colorado Front Range make “down scaling” of global models to the local specific region challenging. Acknowledging this caveat, the best available data to date was compared to the paleohydrology analysis that was completed, and the possible futures associated with these climate change models are primarily captured within the conditions modeled through the paleohydrologic analysis. The City will continue to monitor improvements to these climate models and compare climate model results with the current results. These recent upgrades to inputs for the Water Supply Plan set the stage for a robust coordination process with the Comprehensive Plan beginning the second quarter of 2019 to ensure resiliency is captured in all scenarios.

**Feasibility of Infrastructure and Service Costs**

The 2013 Comprehensive Plan anticipated $1 billion in infrastructure improvements across the Utilities’ 15 service areas to fully realize the plan’s vision. Significant changes in the distribution of land uses or densities may require additional infrastructure. In addition to updating the Water Supply Plan, the City also identified the need to develop a water rate structure that supports the City’s established vision. Westminster is currently at a crossroads; most of the City was developed in the 1970s and the infrastructure established at that time is reaching the end of its useful life. As the City nears build out financial challenges have been identified as the City moves away from tap fees from new development to a system where rate payers will contribute the bulk of utility revenues.

The City’s utility fund is an enterprise fund established to ensure that customer rates and fees are directly invested in the water and wastewater system and segregated from the City’s General Fund. The utility fund has only two sources of revenue: customer rates and tap fees. The Utility’s rates and fees are charged to customers to recover the costs of providing drinking water and
wastewater services. The balance and appropriate setting of these rates and fees is crucial to the short and long-term sustainability of the utility fund.

Water and sewer rates pay for the costs to operate and maintain the Utility, including the costs for labor, chemicals, parts, and contracts. Rates also pay for personnel benefits, debt service (the principal and interest payments due for debt issued to fund projects), and a portion of the costs to repair/replace parts of the Utility system.

Tap fees are charged to new utility customers to connect to the City's water and wastewater systems, and are based on the current value and size of the water and sewer utility systems and on the value of the City's water rights portfolio. These fees generally follow the philosophy that growth pays for growth, therefore tap fee revenues are intended to pay for improvements to the Utility system and to purchase water supplies.

All utilities must deal with the reality that while the vast majority of costs are fixed, the vast majority of revenue is variable. Water sales are impacted by climate, including rain and drought, and water and sewer tap fees are impacted by the timing and amount of development in the City. Westminster adopted a set of financial policies in 2006 to address this revenue variability. As the city approaches buildout, the Utility will gradually increase its reliance on rate revenue as fewer tap fees for new developments are sold. This strategy will allow the Utility to remain sustainable into the future.

The city's population has increased significantly since the water and wastewater utilities were first created, and the Utility has required improvements over time to meet that growth. Improvements are also needed in anticipation of future growth and ongoing repair and replacement work required to keep an aging water and sewer utility system functioning. The Utility’s replacement cost is currently valued at $4 billion, plus a water supply portfolio valued at $1 billion. Like any large asset, the utility system experiences depreciation, where the pieces and parts experience a decline in condition. A system of Westminster's size and value requires a robust planning process to ensure all repairs and improvements are performed in a timely manner to maintain public health and safety while delivering drinking water and collecting and treating wastewater. Over time, the utility system will continue to depreciate and will need additional repairs. City staff regularly performs a robust “eyes on all assets” review. This comprehensive and time-intensive effort provides staff with solid data regarding the condition and anticipated repair/replacement cost of the Utility's capital assets to best inform the rate and tap fee recommendations.

The City has experienced both a significant growth in new customers and major changes in water use patterns by its customers such as more compact development, revitalization of older neighborhoods and an increase in restaurants and microbreweries. These changes affect the amounts of revenue collected by different customer classes and by customers within a given class of customers.

On a regular basis, approximately every 10 years, staff reviews the Utility's rates and fees to ensure they are set fairly and equitably and are being recovered from the appropriate customers. City
Council authorized a contract with a consultant to assist City Staff with this comprehensive review. The consultant’s work was completed in 2018, and its evaluation of the City’s rate revenues indicates that some revenue rebalancing and revenue stability improvements could be made to ensure that fair and equitable rates and fees are charged to our customers, and to provide enhanced revenue stability. The 2019 and 2020 utility rate and fee recommendations therefore include ways to realign the revenues to ensure that all customers are paying their fair share of the costs associated with running a Utility and are not paying for services that they are not receiving.

In the 1990s, Westminster established a series of inclining block rate structures to encourage water conservation, referred to as “tiers.” This tier structure charges more for higher water use, thus water use within each block rate costs increasingly more. The first tier of water use is generally indoor water use. The existing block structure is shown in the table below.

**Table 5. Existing Water Rate Block Structure**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Water Rate Blocks</th>
<th>Gallons per Block</th>
<th>2018 Rates per 1,000 gallons/month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Block 1</td>
<td>1,000 - 4,000 gallons</td>
<td>$3.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block 2</td>
<td>5,000 - 20,000 gallons</td>
<td>$5.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block 3</td>
<td>Over 21,000 gallons</td>
<td>$7.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Monthly water use is charged by block rate on an increasing basis where the first 4,000 gallons are charged at the Block 1 rate, the next 5,000-20,000 gallons of use are charged at the Block 2 rate, and any water use over 21,000 gallons is charged at the Block 3 rate.

Of Westminster’s approximately 33,000 utility accounts, 95% are residential customers. Most residential customer indoor water use falls within the first tier. Water use that falls within the second and third tiers is generally the result of watering residential landscapes during the irrigation season.

The Utility does charge different rates for the remaining 5% of the utility customers, primarily commercial and irrigation customers, depending on a number of factors. The Utility also provides water to out-of-city customers including unincorporated Jefferson County and Shaw Heights, and the City of Federal Heights per contract. These out-of-city and contract rates have a rate escalator associated with them based on the contract terms.

To shore up the financial viability of the utility the City has identified water and sewer rate increases for years 2019 and 2020 driven by the age and condition of the utility system. The recommendation is a net 10% water rate increase and a net 16% sewer rate increase in 2019, and a net 10% water rate increase and a net 12% sewer rate increase in 2020 to maintain a financially and operationally sustainable Utility.

Revenues from the rate increases will be directed to specific infrastructure that has already shown signs of failure or reached the end of its useful life. The rate increases will be more significant than past years to fund critical needs, including:
• Funding the rising cost of maintenance and repairs to aging infrastructure. This includes pipes, pumps, tanks, chemicals, repair parts and equipment.
• Replacing the aging Semper Water Treatment Facility to ensure high-quality drinking water for the community now and into the future.
• Funding critical improvements to the Big Dry Creek Interceptor Sewer, primarily to deal with known age and condition concerns while also addressing capacity within the sewer system. A development moratorium is currently in place in the area served by this Interceptor due to lack of capacity for additional sewer flows.

The utility rate increases are the result of a year-long study and reflect the demands of operating and investing in a $4 billion infrastructure system that provides safe, high quality, compliant and reliable water and sewer services to customers. Such a study had not been performed since 2006, and it clearly revealed that rates and fees were not keeping pace with infrastructure needs.

To provide fairness and equity with the rate increase, the first tier of water use will be increased from 4,000 gallons to 6,000 gallons to ensure that the indoor water use of a majority of residential customers will be billed at the lower Tier 1 rate. Customers who use a higher amount of water have a greater impact on the City’s infrastructure and water resources. This impact is currently absorbed by other customers. Future recommendations would implement a new Tier 4 rate so that extremely high-water use customers pay the costs of their additional treatment and water supply needs, which will ensure that customers are paying for the services they receive and are not paying for the services they do not receive. The recommendation is to defer the implementation of Tier 4 until 2021 to allow time for city staff to educate this customer group about the upcoming rate implementation impacts and ways to reduce their water use or improve their water use efficiency.

Conservation
In addition to a conservation oriented rate structure, the City has other conservation measures including the following programs:

• Since toilets are the largest water user in a home, the City actively promotes toilet replacement with water efficient “WaterSense” labeled toilets, which can reduce water use by 20% or more on each flush.
• Outdoor irrigation accounts for about half of a household’s total water consumption annually so the City provides free sprinkler consultations and has established a “Garden in a Box” program consisting of starter plants, a plant by number map and care guide. Removing just 100 square feet of irrigated turf and planting a Garden in a Box can save an estimated 1,000 gallons of water per year.
To further promote conservation, as part of the effort to update the City’s Development Code, the city has identified proposed landscape ordinance updates, including standards for drought tolerant and native plantings. The City is exploring how to further promote and require conservation measures maintenance practices. Landscape provisions will benefit from a new “zero” hydrozone with clearly outlined temporary irrigation provisions, and maximums for the “high” hydrozones reduced further than in the residential standards, which were amended earlier in 2018. Stakeholder interview responses also identified several items pertaining to survivability: soil amendment specifications and timing, and increasing parking lot island size so that plants can thrive and people can exit vehicles without crushing plants. Additional considerations could include expanding upon the City’s recycled water system, and additional conservation measures and infrastructure investments and tradeoffs.

Wastewater Considerations

Indoor water use is closely tied to sewer to the point where it can often be used as a proxy for sewer infrastructure demands, and vice versa. The main difference is that water rights and availability can generally be transferred across the whole city, but sewer pipes must be sized according to the demands locally.

Improvements to the Little Dry Creek interceptor are nearing completion and thus establish a finite capacity within the basin for a long term. Two Focus Areas are entirely located within Little Dry Creek basin – Downtown and the Station Area, and a portion of the Brookhill Focus Area sewers to Little Dry Creek.
The Big Dry Creek Interceptor Sewer project will address critical sanitary sewer capacity issues in the area of the city generally north of 92nd Avenue. The City of Westminster currently has a moratorium on new development applications in the basin that would increase demand on the system. The 12-month moratorium went into effect on July 24, 2018. Advanced modeling and analysis allowed comparison of condition-related improvements with identified capacity constraints in the system. This in turn produced a final list of required project areas. The base project for Big Dry Creek was an identified 4.5 miles of interceptor in need of replacement located between Church Ranch and the Big Dry Creek Treatment Plant. Significant land use changes further upstream may be limited by capacity of tributary sewer interceptors. For example, while interceptor improvements between Church Ranch and the Treatment Plant may allow additional capacity in locations such as Walnut Creek, the Promenade or the other undeveloped properties in this section, significant changes in land use resulting in increased sewer flows where these sites are served by tributary lines in the outer edges of the service area such as along Sims or near Standley Lake may not be possible.

Finally, both hydraulic capacity and loading capacity must be evaluated to ensure that Big Dry Creek Water Treatment Facility will be sufficient to meet build out demands. The City's Big Dry Creek Wastewater Treatment Facility (BDCWWTF), located at 132nd Avenue and Huron Street, treats an average of 7 million gallons of wastewater per day from the northern two-thirds of the city. Current work on the facility includes a new de-watering operation. The biosolids by-product produced during the treatment process is stabilized, thickened and beneficially utilized as a soil supplement and fertilizer on permitted farms fields in the eastern part of Colorado. The City will construct a new dewatering facility on the BDCWWTF campus to replace aging equipment and improve the efficiency of the overall solids management program, resulting in more efficient plant operations, reduced truck traffic and improved farm operations.

**Water Treatment Facilities**

Water 2025 is a long-term planning project to replace the City's aging Semper Water Treatment Facility and ensure high-quality drinking water for our community now and into the future. The goal of this effort is to identify the best site for the new facility in 2019 using a systematic review process that is based on technical and operational requirements, as well as significant community engagement.

Our safe and reliable drinking water system is one of Westminster’s greatest assets. We are fortunate to enjoy a high-quality water supply originating in the Rocky Mountains. As Westminster and all of the Front Range continues to grow, we need to responsibly plan for the needs of future generations so our children can enjoy the same quality of life we do today.

Like any complex system, Westminster’s water distribution system requires continuous maintenance and planned upgrades. As Westminster’s current drinking water system continues to age, it becomes more expensive to maintain and increasingly vulnerable to threats posed by drought and wildfire.
Semper Water Treatment Facility has served the Westminster community faithfully for almost 50 years and has the ability to continue providing high-quality drinking water for 15 to 20 more years. However, as Semper nears the end of its planned lifecycle, the City must begin proactively planning for a new drinking water treatment facility to meet the needs of our current and future generations who rely on this essential public service.

A new drinking water facility using advanced new technology will provide:

- Greater resiliency in times of challenging treatment, such as a wildfire in our watershed.
- Greater flexibility to adapt to changing regulatory standards.
- Greater security to address future shortages in our water supply.
- Greater opportunities for environmental sustainability and resource stewardship.

Water 2025 began in early 2018 with the goal of identifying the best location for the City’s new drinking water treatment facility. Once a site is selected, the following design and construction phases.

![Water 2025 Timeline](image-url)
Reference and Resource List

1. U.S. Census and American Community Survey
2. 2013 Comprehensive Plan
3. 2030 Bicycle Master Plan
4. Mobility Action Plan 2017
5. Water Conservation Plan 2013
6. Parks and Recreation Master Plan 2010-2014
7. Westminster Public Library Master Plan 2017-2021
8. 2014 Open Space Stewardship Plan
9. Strategic Plan
10. Westminster Station Area Specific Plan
11. Downtown Specific Plan
12. Affordable & Workforce Housing Strategic Plan 2017
13. Financial Sustainability Plan
14. Hazard Mitigation Plan
15. DRCOG Metro Vision
16. 2017 Housing Needs Assessment
17. Colorado State Demography Office
18. RTD's 2017 Boardings Data