



1.0

INTRODUCTION AND VISION

The 2040 Comprehensive Plan is an official policy document of the City of Westminster. The Comprehensive Plan establishes a consistent statement of the city's plans and policies for future development, and is meant to be a living document that is updated over time to respond to changing conditions and the evolving needs of the community. All parts of the Plan, in conjunction with partner plans, work together towards the realization of the city's vision for the future.

This chapter provides information about development of the Plan, the legal foundation and relationship to other city planning efforts, establishes plan cornerstones for the Plan document, and highlights planning influences critical to Plan formation and its 2040 planning horizon.



Photo: Anton Mayer

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The 2040 Comprehensive Plan outlines the community's vision for the future through a framework of goals and policies that support a thriving and healthy community comprised of great neighborhoods. The Comprehensive Plan (referred to as the Plan through the remainder of this document) establishes guidance to help move closer to the community's vision. The long-range policies of the Plan provide a basis for evaluating specific development opportunities and public projects, with coordination among all city departments. Plan policies also provide the basis for establishing and setting priorities for more detailed plans and implementation programs including specific and area plans, the Capital Improvement Program, and the Unified Development Code. The achievement of the vision and goals of the Plan relies on guidance and decision-making of the city Council and implementation by city staff and many other local and regional partners.

WATER SUPPLY INFLUENCES GROWTH

Westminster's water supply is finite and all decisions related to the physical development of the city are grounded in water supply. Remaining opportunities to increase water supply yield of the system are primarily centered on increasing operational efficiency and expanding reservoir storage. To be truly sustainable, the city must live within available resources, which may be further constrained by drought and the extent of conservation activities. To meet this Vision a variety of factors, including water supply and infrastructure, is weighed and thoughtfully balanced in the 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

A LIVING PLAN

The Plan is intended to be a living document that city staff, elected officials, and community partners use to drive the city towards its vision. As a living document the Plan should be flexible to incorporate changes as the community evolves over time and, as needed, updated over time to remain relevant to changing conditions and evolving needs of the community. Chapter 9 establishes a biennial reporting process to facilitate this review process.



1.2 A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PLAN

The Plan update process kicked off in Summer 2018, with the Imagine Westminster event, stakeholder and agency interviews, and the first online survey. This initial phase focused on understanding key issues, opportunities, and challenges that would influence policy direction in the Plan. The most common themes that were initially brought up centered on sustainably managing resources, balancing urban and suburban environments, and being an inclusive community. Responses showed that the Westminster community values the parks, recreation, open space, trail network, and mountain views in Westminster, while indicating that improvements could be made in regard to transit service, walkability, and support for local businesses. Input from the public and city staff helped articulate the key components of the city vision, which were then translated into the Plan's Plan Cornerstones.

Online questionnaires, public event activities, and city staff workshops helped identify areas in the city that had the most opportunity for new development, infill or redevelopment. These areas were analyzed based on quantitative and qualitative data and were referenced consistently throughout the planning process to understand future desired character and how city policies and strategies might influence these areas. This analysis and process updated the Focus Areas and highlighted additional Transition Areas that merit special considerations for future planning.

Going into 2019, city staff continued the process to actively engage Westminster's residents, business owners, and local and regional partners to assist with the development of city policies. With the preliminary visioning priorities and opportunities identified, the outreach activities were constructed to dive deeper into each issue. Questionnaire results, written comments, and in-person discussions were synthesized and insights translated into the Plan's goals, policies, and potential strategic actions. This process took an iterative approach with multiple city staff workshops focusing on each section of the Plan and revisions to the Future Land Use Diagram. Ultimately, these draft goals and policies were presented for public review in 2021.

Direct involvement with city officials was also an essential element of this planning process. At major milestones of Plan development, City Council and Planning Commission provided input and direction. All documents, presentations, and analysis produced during the planning process, including presentations to the Council, were posted on the city's Comprehensive Plan webpage.

PLANNING PROCESS BY THE NUMBERS

- 12** Public Events
- 10** Small Community Meetings
- 8** Online Activities
- 54** Interviews
- 9** Study Sessions with City Council
- 20,000+** Unique Website Views
- 9** City Edition Articles
- 4** Meeting-In-A-Box Events

1.3 VISION & PLAN CORNERSTONES

CITY OF WESTMINSTER VISION

The Westminster City Council has established a vision for the future. This vision provides a foundation for this Comprehensive Plan.

Westminster is a city of beautiful, safe, well-maintained neighborhoods and destinations with a vibrant, diverse economy, rich and resilient environment, and a strong sense of community and belonging.

The intent of the Comprehensive Plan is to guide decisions to support a thriving and healthy community, manage growth, and foster great neighborhoods. The following Plan Cornerstones, in alignment with the City of Westminster Vision, serve as the platform for the goals and policies of this Plan. They express a community vision for an active, diverse, and livable city.

THRIVING CITY

Westminster has a strong identity that values being bold, innovative, and different. We promote diversity and inclusiveness, and celebrate cultural and artistic expression.

Westminster is a community recognized along the Front Range for its extensive open space network, well-designed infrastructure, and high-quality built environment. The Plan will continue to emphasize the community's identity and presence both locally and regionally. The continuation of small business support throughout the city and programming of arts and cultural activities, as well as the infusion of private investment and new development in Focus Areas, will enhance the community's image and establish it as a desirable place to live, conduct business, recreate, and visit. The Plan also emphasizes the city's natural amenities and views to the mountains and Downtown Denver as distinctive qualities to be preserved and celebrated. Finally, Westminster will continue to develop and strengthen its identity through special events, embracing diversity, and a sense of belonging for all voices within the community.

Westminster cultivates a diverse, healthy, and resilient economy with an emphasis on financial sustainability, leveraging the city's role in the region and adapting to changing trends and technologies.

With its central location between Denver and Boulder, the City of Westminster is strategically positioned to capitalize on economic growth opportunities along the US 36 technology corridor, as well as the northern I-25 corridor linking Denver to Fort Collins and beyond. The Denver metro region is growing and attracting new talent, presenting opportunities for Westminster to expand and diversify the city's unique neighborhoods, open space and recreational amenities, and access to transit. This contributes to making Westminster a desirable place in which to live, work, and visit. Furthermore, the proximity to Denver and Boulder provides an ideal location for employers wishing to attract and retain a high-quality labor force. Building on the city's assets, the Plan will focus on growth and diversification of the city's employment and



commercial bases to create a resilient local economy. Employment development efforts will focus on establishing and reinforcing business and industry clusters, allowing for flexibility to adapt to the next generation of jobs, workspace, and technologies.

HEALTHY PLACES

Westminster has a built environment that embraces the outdoors through a comprehensive, integrated parks and open space system.

Westminster's pattern of development protects the network of open space, trails and high-quality parks, and defines the physical character and image of the community. The extensive network of trails, open space corridors, and conservation areas weaves through the fabric of the city, connecting with parks, neighborhoods, schools, community facilities, employment centers, and activity districts. Residents, workers, and visitors have access to a range of recreation opportunities and benefit from the protection of sensitive environmental habitats, water quality, and view corridors. The network also connects residents to regional trails, on-street pedestrian and bicycle routes, neighboring jurisdictions, and transit stations in support of air quality. The Comprehensive Plan supports active living through both recreational and multimodal travel opportunities.

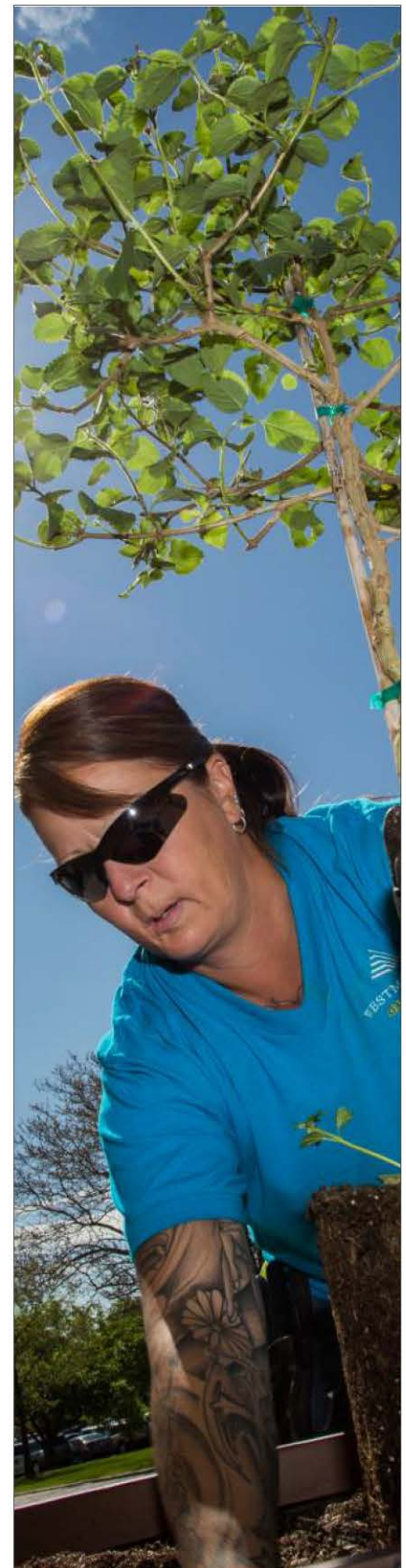
Westminster strives to be one of the most sustainable, safe, and healthy cities in America.

Westminster enjoys a high quality of life that is supported by a sense of safety and confidence throughout the community. The ability to enjoy the city's natural amenities, residential neighborhoods, employment and activity centers, and transit connections in a safe, secure environment is a key priority. Being a sustainable community means ensuring that Westminster is a desirable place in which to live, work, visit, and play for current and future generations. Additionally, the Plan supports the ability of police and fire departments to maintain high standards for service response and emergency preparedness. The Plan will promote access to a healthy lifestyle by promoting connectivity to and use of the city's open space, trail, and park network; a wide range of recreation and library facilities for all ages and abilities; and ensuring residents and workers have access to health and human services and nutritious foods.

GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS

Westminster has a strong sense of local pride in our well-designed and attractive neighborhoods.

Westminster is defined by its distinctive and varied neighborhoods and integrated network of parks and trails. The city's range of choices and character in neighborhoods provides a diverse mix of



NEIGHBORHOOD UNIT

One of the strategies to ensure the Plan Cornerstones are followed through in future investments by the city and private parties is the “Neighborhood Unit.” Through public engagement there was a preference for mixed-use development patterns, but in strategic locations and composition. Diversity of housing types—supported by nearby activities such as restaurants, retail and a park for community gathering—was identified as an element of the ideal neighborhood. This involves incorporating parks as social spaces and civic hubs. There was also an interest in walkable, well-connected environments with smaller, neighborhood services closer to housing. Westminster neighborhoods should also plan to address changing demographics and associated housing needs for households with various compositions and multiple generations.

For more details about how to implement the Neighborhood Unit concept, see chapter 3: Land Use & Development.

Neighborhood Unit conceptual illustration

settings and environments. The Plan will continue to foster a range of high-quality living options that support the city’s active lifestyle. Parks, recreation facilities, libraries, neighborhood shopping and services, schools, and other community facilities will serve the needs of residents, reinforcing neighborhood character and cultural identity. Connections from residential neighborhoods to employment centers, transit, commercial centers, and the city’s open space and trails system will be emphasized. Where new neighborhoods are planned, a mix of uses, and interconnected street network will further foster an active, walkable environment throughout the city.

Westminster provides a balanced mix of housing opportunities for a range of incomes, age groups, and lifestyle choices.

Providing a balanced mix of housing opportunities in the city will continue to be a focus of planning efforts. Accommodating a wide range of age groups and lifestyle choices will reinforce the city’s identity as a diverse, attractive place in which to live and work. The Plan will focus on maintaining the quality of the existing housing inventory, support opportunities for home ownership, as well as locating complementary land uses and infrastructure to serve the needs of all community members. Policies that integrate housing with economic opportunity, a sense of belonging, and attention to the physical and mental health of residents will be supported throughout the Plan.

MANAGED GROWTH

Westminster is a mature city that will continue to evolve and thrive through further employment development and vision-aligned infill and redevelopment.

The city is quickly approaching its physical build out of existing vacant land. As Westminster continues to evolve and grow, much of the future development will focus on employment development. The Plan provides a framework for balancing economic





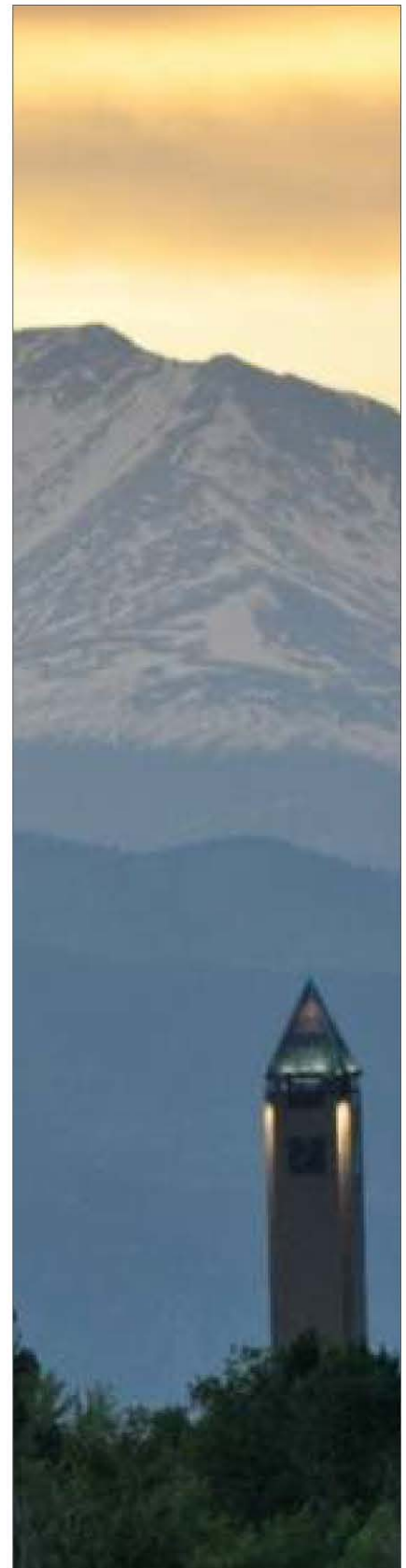
development with preservation of established neighborhoods. New mixed-use development will be limited to key locations with access to a supporting transportation system and transit. Attention will be paid to fostering an active public realm with blocks sized for walkability, building design that shapes and activates the pedestrian environment, and parks and public spaces that reinforce and foster community identity. Supporting policies and implementation efforts will ensure future neighborhoods are vibrant and viable.

Westminster supports a multimodal transportation network that provides safe and well-connected transportation and mobility choices to connect people to local and regional destinations.

The City of Westminster supports a comprehensive transportation system that allows for safe and efficient travel for drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders. The Westminster Transportation & Mobility Plan provides a framework for travel through the city with a network of streets, sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and trails. The Comprehensive Plan integrates land use and transportation planning efforts to ensure mobility options throughout the city. The existing street network will be maintained and improved for safety and comfort of users. New street and trail connections and alignments will ensure the city's employment and activity centers are easy to access both locally and regionally. "First Mile, Final Mile" concepts will be supported by bicycle and pedestrian connections to transit stations, as well as development adjacent to stations, which will support and encourage transit ridership within the city.

Westminster responsibly manages water and natural resources, prioritizing environmental stewardship and understanding feasibility of infrastructure and resource availability.

The city's integration of land use with water supply and ongoing stewardship of resources, including water, energy, habitat, and natural areas, provide the framework for a sustainable environment that will continue to impact all aspects of physical planning in the city. The Plan emphasizes management of the city's water supply, with policies and land use planning that will maintain water availability at citywide buildout. Because Westminster is largely built out, the sustainability and resiliency of existing neighborhoods will become a more central focus as development of the few remaining vacant lands becomes less critical with time. In the few locations where new development is anticipated the city will encourage the efficient use of land and resources. These measures will all contribute to environmental resilience and public health.



1.4 PLAN THEMES & CROSS-CUTTING TOPICS

In alignment with the Plan Cornerstones and Vision, the Plan is organized by six themes. Each of these themes is encompassed in a chapter of the Plan, which includes context and background and set of goals and policies. Through community engagement and the planning process, six additional topics were identified that impact each of the Comprehensive Plan themes. These cross-cutting topics are integrated within each theme chapter.



CROSS-CUTTING TOPICS Education

The City of Westminster is committed to equitable access to education in a number of ways, even as the city does not have direct authority over school districts or educational institutions. Many municipal facilities, departments, and programs are dedicated to supporting literacy, community engagement and empowerment, and public outreach and education. This includes the Westminster library system but also the city’s recreation programs for educational enrichment, interpretive and educational signs in natural areas, and even public education campaigns related to recycling, water conservation, and hazard mitigation. The city also supports workforce training through partnerships and scholarships for employees of small businesses. This Plan supports opportunities for lifelong learning, workforce training, and personal growth, as well as the technology, infrastructure, and built environment necessary to support these opportunities.



Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

The 2022 update to the city’s vision statement values a sense of community and belonging. 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. The city’s pursuit of equitable processes is grounded in providing opportunity for all voices to be heard and drawing upon community diversity in decision-making.



As Westminster's population grows, the city is gaining greater diversity in its residents. This includes residents born in another country or whose parents were born in another country, speak a language other than English at home, or identify as Hispanic/Latinx. To address the future needs of the city, preferences and specific challenges for various populations need to be considered. Westminster is making strides in the right direction with Equity, Diversity & Inclusion initiatives throughout the organization as well as extensive cultural programming that celebrates the diverse communities of Westminster and opportunities for cross-cultural connections. Considerations such as cultural expectations, age, and physical and mental ability are necessary in order to create a sense of community and belonging.



Health

The City of Westminster is committed to the health, safety, and wellbeing of its residents. Public health is closely linked to the intentional design practices and land use planning that increase public safety and opportunities for physical activity and healthy eating. Specifically, this Plan emphasizes the interrelationship between the built environment and public health by focusing on policy questions such as how land use supports active transportation; how neighborhood design and development patterns improve walkability and safe, convenient pedestrian access to services like schools, parks, healthcare, and fresh food; how parks, open space and trails can connect to bicycle and pedestrian systems; and how land use can improve transit access, especially for those most in need.

The 2019 American Community Survey shows that 10.5%—11,865 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 34% or 5,053 seniors living with a disability that requires planning for access to essential services and amenities. Not all disabilities are visible or related to mobility impairments, so while it is important to consider physical mobility and accessibility, it is also critical to make allowances for sensory impairments and cognitive disabilities.

This Plan integrates health language and policies that resonate locally, creating opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to make choices that allow them to live a long, healthy life. An improved built environment leads to improved public health at the community level. The Plan also provides support for factors that influence health like aging in place, walkable/bikeable neighborhoods, and easy access to daily goods and services, all of which ultimately contribute to reduced healthcare costs.



Photo credit: Gena Bloemendaal



Parking Lot Bioswale



Resilience

Residents all along the Front Range are accustomed to change. A booming population, shifting demographics, economic cycles, and the threats of natural disasters are among the myriad factors to which residents must continually anticipate and adapt to regionally. While community resilience is typically defined as the ability to bounce back and adapt to shocks and stresses, these disruptive events can be felt in the physical environment as well as in the pocketbook. As an institution, Westminster strives to maintain its fiscal resilience despite the low points in economic cycles. Westminster also pro-actively plans for natural hazards, primarily through the Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP), which identifies the range of hazards and prioritizes strategies to mitigate those risks.

In the context of city’s infrastructure, including utilities, streets, and drainage, resiliency refers to the ability of the systems (including their interconnected natural processes and social systems) to absorb disturbance and still retain functionality and structural capacity. Essential maintenance of the system must be maintained to ensure public safety and resiliency from hazards and disruptions.

Westminster is currently at a crossroads: most of the city was developed in the 1970s and 1980s, and the infrastructure established at that time is nearing the end of its useful life and will be less reliable without extensive repair and replacement work to ensure safe operations in future years. As the city nears buildout, there will be less opportunity to collect tap fees from new development. As Westminster transitions from this development-driven system to that of rate payers contributing the bulk of revenue, financial challenges will need to be reconciled to ensure reliability of essential infrastructure in future years.

Planning for community resiliency is a dynamic cycle that must build on past experiences, while also preparing the community to respond and adapt to future opportunities, changes, and threats. Not only is community resiliency the ability to recover after a change such as a disaster event, but it is also enhancing the ability of Westminster’s people, places, and economy to prepare for and thrive when change occurs. It involves activities such as supporting the health of natural systems like watersheds and air; managing and reinforcing elements of the built environment such as utility infrastructure, mobility, and buildings; and strengthening the economic and social fabric of the community.



Safety

Working to ensure a safe and secure living and working environment is a priority for Westminster, as “safe neighborhoods” are a component of the city’s



vision statement. This is reflected in the support and partnerships with the municipal police and fire departments, but extends also to Westminster's built environment—how we build transportation connections and our public spaces, and where we locate critical infrastructure.

A multimodal transportation network includes all the ways people move around the city. It is important to provide a transportation system that is safe and comfortable for all users, focusing on minimizing conflicts between cars, transit, bikes, and pedestrians. This understanding is introduced in the Comprehensive Plan and further articulated in the Transportation & Mobility Plan.

The practice of ensuring a safe community also extends to disaster preparedness and the resiliency of critical infrastructure. Assessment and mitigation of risks are key roles for the city in land use and emergency management planning, whether that means locating municipal facilities out of the floodplain, or regulating building codes for fire protection.



Climate

The City of Westminster is committed to being an environmentally responsible city and in 2019 completed its first ever greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions inventory as part of the planning process for the Sustainability Plan. Increasing GHG emissions lead to climate change that may significantly affect human and environmental health, along with economic and social well-being. Warmer temperatures lead to heat waves and increased concentrations of air and water pollutants, and can exacerbate demand impacts on water supply. Given the city's proximity to the foothills and extensive open space, portions of the city are at risk for wildfires from steadily rising temperatures and a drier climate.

The city's residents are also affected by increasing air pollution from vehicle emissions and other sources. Key findings from the GHG inventory indicate that emissions from on-road transportation (emissions from gasoline and diesel vehicles), building electricity (burning fossil fuels to produce electricity) and natural gas consumption are the three largest sources of emissions. Together these sources comprise 86% of total emissions. Most of the remaining emission sources are from aviation (estimated air travel for Westminster residents from Denver International Airport). Managing air pollution and developing climate change resilience is critical to the human, economic, and environmental health of communities.

By understanding how the community contributes to GHG emissions and poor air quality, changes can be made in daily activities that can positively impact the climate and reduce air



Westminster Firefighter



Gateway Feature

pollutants. Air quality may be enhanced using multiple techniques, such as expanding the urban tree canopy, providing convenient multimodal transportation options and alternative vehicle fueling infrastructure, reducing traffic congestion, and incorporating green building practices and green infrastructure (e.g., natural stormwater features) throughout the community. The strategies and actions identified in the Sustainability Plan can lead to reduction in GHG emissions. These are complemented throughout the Comprehensive Plan with goals and policies that support a mix of land uses serviced by multimodal transportation, sustainable development practices that reduce carbon footprints in businesses, access to health resources and recreation opportunities, and convenient access to places of employment and services to fulfill the daily needs of residents.

1.5 HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

ORGANIZATION

The Plan Cornerstones introduced in Section 1.3 establish the long-term aspirations for what the Comprehensive Plan is intended to accomplish. In any instance where an aspect of the Plan is unclear, the Plan Cornerstones should be liberally interpreted to inform the desired action. The chapters of the Plan organize content around common topic areas. Chapters 3 through 8 reflect goals and policies related to the themes introduced in Section 1.4. Each chapter is organized around a series of goals and policies. While the narrative provides context, the goals and policies have priority in interpreting and applying the Plan over other content. Goals are broad statements to help realize the Plan Cornerstones. Policies define subcomponents of each goal with more specific recommendations to achieve the goals.

Two separate documents accompany this Comprehensive Plan: an Existing Conditions & Planning Challenges Report and an Implementation Action Plan. The Existing Conditions & Planning Challenges Report highlights trends and data analysis that established the foundation and starting point for this Plan.

The Implementation Action Plan was developed to complement this document. It identifies future actions the city and non-city partners may undertake to carry out Plan concepts. Because of the frequency of updates to the action plan based on budgets, workplan priorities, staff capacity, and external variables, that document is maintained outside of this Plan.



Chapter 1: Introduction & Vision includes the purpose and overall planning context for the Plan, as well as the Plan Cornerstones that provide the framework for the goals and policies in the following chapters.

Chapter 2: Utilities & Resources outlines policies to support the sustainability and resiliency of existing and future neighborhoods with the provision and availability of city utilities, infrastructure systems and public service. Functional plans that supplement these policies include the Sustainability Plan, Water Efficiency Plan, and Water Supply Plan.

Chapter 3: Land Use & Development provides direction for a balanced mix of land uses, sustainable design, development standards, and regional collaboration. This chapter includes high-level direction for this element, with more detailed standards for development included with Code Forward.

Chapter 4: Transportation, Mobility & Connections includes direction for all modes of travel in the city, ensuring that vehicle, bicycle, pedestrian, and transit movement is balanced and coordinated. This chapter includes high-level direction for this element, with more detailed goals, actions, and policies included within the city's Transportation & Mobility Plan.

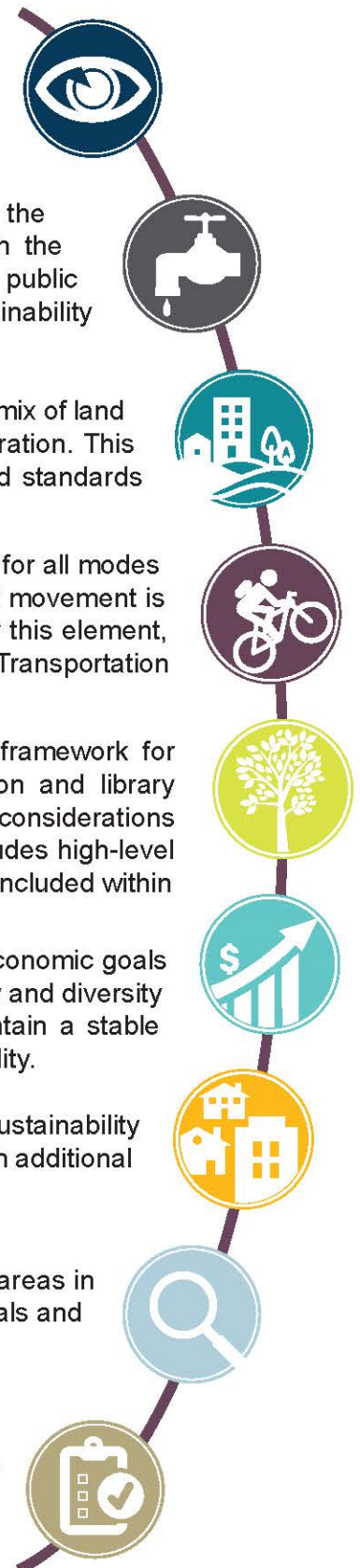
Chapter 5: Health, Wellness & Community Services outlines the framework for provision, creation, and maintenance of parks, open space, recreation and library facilities, and arts and culture in the city. This chapter also identifies considerations for education, health, human services, and public safety. Chapter 5 includes high-level direction for this element, with more detailed goals, actions, and policies included within the Parks, Recreation & Libraries Plan.

Chapter 6: Economic & Financial Resilience establishes high-level economic goals and introduces financial policies to promote economic health, opportunity and diversity in the community that are necessary to generate the revenue to maintain a stable fiscal base at the municipal level, ensuring long-term financial sustainability.

Chapter 7: Housing & Neighborhoods supplements policies in the Sustainability Plan relative to neighborhood services and addressing housing needs with additional context on city identity and heritage.

Chapter 8: Community Places provides a planning framework for key areas in the city, and references specific area plans that include more specific goals and policies to guide future planning and development in these areas.

Chapter 9: Plan Administration delineates the applicability, administration and toolkit of city programs that are interrelated with the Comprehensive Plan.





WHO CAN USE THIS PLAN?

A wide range of users will find meaning in the 2040 Comprehensive Plan. Westminster residents and property owners, businesses and developers, and city staff, leaders, and partners all use the Comprehensive Plan to guide and realize the future success of our city.

Residents and Property Owners: To document values and vision for the future of Westminster, in a way that allows them to participate as informed and active citizens in the overall physical development of the city, including decisions about land use that impact them most directly.

Businesses and Developers: To provide guidance on how to best achieve the community's vision in ways that allow them to grow, adapt, and implement their development and business plans.

City Staff: To work with applicants and stakeholders to review development proposals and to provide decision-makers with information about how the proposals align with the intention, vision, and policies of the Plan.

- To create and implement city initiatives including Code changes and process improvements that advance the goals and recommendations of this Plan.
- To work collaboratively with stakeholders on the more detailed plans and projects necessary to implement and achieve the goals of this Plan.

City Leaders: To position Westminster for the future by establishing annual work plan priorities, developing partnerships, ensuring accountability of city departments, and making thoughtful and informed decisions in harmony with the goals of this Plan.

City Partners: To provide information to governmental, non-profit, and private sector partners on the city's future development and infrastructure, including surrounding communities, transportation providers, regional planning groups, and other key regional players.