

Gardner Magazine Reports

Westminster MA – November 2026

A Series of Reports and Insights derived from the November South Street Sentinel and Town Crier Episode 36.

Executive Briefing: Town of Westminster Municipal Operations, Public Safety, and Community Services (November 2026)

Executive Summary

This briefing document synthesizes critical administrative updates, public safety directives, health evaluations, and community events for the Town of Westminster, Massachusetts, as detailed in the November 2026 edition of The South Street Sentinel.

Key developments include:

- **Electoral Administration:** Mandatory registration and ballot request deadlines leading up to the **November 3, 2026** Massachusetts State Election, alongside preparations for the **November 17, 2026** Special Town Meeting.
- **Infrastructure & Public Safety:** Selection of **Vertex** by the Public Safety Building Committee to conduct property and safety assessments; transition from Code Red to the **Everbridge** emergency alert system; establishment of a new school speed zone on State Road East; and the retirement of firefighter Tim Hurd after over 43 years of service.
- **Public Health & Economic Assistance:** A formal public update on November 16 regarding the Department of Public Health's (DPH) Town-Wide Health Data Evaluation, alongside winter fuel assistance programs (EHHAP) and local charitable drives.

- **Community Integration:** A series of public engagement events hosted by Community Services, including the inaugural Community Spaghetti Supper, a Holiday Swap, and youth programming at the Forbush Memorial Library.

1. Town Governance, Elections & Municipal Operations

2026 Massachusetts State Election Protocol

The Town Clerk's Office, led by Westminster's first appointed Town Clerk **Jayne Davolio**, has established key operational deadlines for the upcoming State Election on **Tuesday, November 3, 2026**.

Action / Request	Deadline Date	Time / Details
Voter Registration Deadline	Saturday, October 24, 2026	5:00 PM
Vote-by-Mail Application Deadline	Thursday, October 27, 2026	5:00 PM
Absentee Ballot Application (by mail)	Thursday, October 27, 2026	5:00 PM
In-Person Absentee Voting Deadline	Monday, November 2, 2026	12:00 PM
Early Voting Schedule Announcement	Posted October 8, 2026	Publicly available online/in-office

Note: Voters may register online, by mail, or in person at the Town Clerk's Office. Inquiries can be directed to 978-874-7408.

Fall 2026 Special Town Meeting

- **Date & Time:** Tuesday, November 17, 2026, at 6:30 PM.
- **Location:** Westminster Elementary School (9 Academy Hill Road).
- **Process & Approvals:** The Warrant was reviewed during the October 5 and October 19 Select Board meetings and discussed

on the Town Crier Podcast. Final approval of the warrant occurs at the November 2 Select Board meeting, with public posting on the town website on November 3. Details are also distributed via mail postcards.

- **Contact:** Tamie Chiarelli at 978-874-7408 or tchiarelli@westminster-ma.gov.

Municipal Operations & Tax Schedule

- **Tax Due Date:** FY25 2nd Quarter Real Estate and Personal Property Tax bills are due **Monday, November 2, 2026**. (Bills were originally mailed with the 1st Quarter bills in July). Unreceived bills must be requested immediately through the Treasurer/Collector Office.
- **Town Hall Operating Hours:**
 - Monday: 7:00 AM – 7:00 PM
 - Tuesday – Thursday: 7:30 AM – 4:30 PM (Cash or check only at counter)
 - Friday: Closed
 - After-Hours Submissions: Locked drop-box available in front of Town Hall (checks payable to "Town of Westminster"). Online card payments accessible via www.westminster-ma.gov.

2. Public Safety, Infrastructure & Emergency Management

Public Safety Building Project Update

The Public Safety Building Committee has officially selected **Vertex** to drive the next phase of the building assessment project. Vertex will perform the following core duties:

1. Assess overarching community public safety facility needs.

2. Secure an architect.
3. Formally evaluate municipal properties located at **7–11 South Street** and **5 Meetinghouse Road** to guide future development.

Emergency Alert System Transition: Everbridge

Westminster has decommissioned the Code Red platform and partnered with **Everbridge** for emergency management and routine public notifications (e.g., severe weather, fires, floods, road closures, and water utility maintenance).

- **Account Migration Requirement:** While user data from Code Red was migrated automatically, residents and business owners **must create a new Everbridge account and manually configure personal settings** to ensure preferred delivery (cell phone, SMS, home phone, or email).
- **Registration Portal:**
<https://member.everbridge.net/93013422375055/login>

Westminster Police Department Updates

- **VFW Donation:** Members of the Police Department and Police Association presented a **\$700 check** to the Westminster VFW Commander. Funds were raised through the sale of commemorative 250th Anniversary Patches recognizing national history and veteran service.
- **State Road East School Zone:** In collaboration with Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School, MassDOT, and the Fitchburg Police Department, MassDOT officially established a reduced speed school zone on State Road East extending into Fitchburg.
 - **Enforced Speed Limit: 20 MPH** during active school hours (**6:30 AM – 8:30 AM** and **2:00 PM – 4:00 PM**).

- **Enforcement Strategy:** Officers are conducting educational traffic enforcement over several weeks to ensure driver compliance.

Westminster Fire Department Updates

- **Retirement Announcement:** Firefighter **Tim Hurd** was given an official send-off on Friday, October 23, following **43+ years** of continuous service (beginning November 17, 1982). Records show Hurd as the 5th longest-serving member in department history, behind Gibby Parks, Deputy Chief Jiggs Ahlin, Chief Brent MacAloney, Chief Kevin Nivala, and Deputy Chief Charlie Clarkson.
 - **Tactical Training Focus:**
 - Ladder Company Operations: Department members conducted structured training differentiating Engine Company duties (water supply, hose advancement, suppression) from Ladder Company duties (building access, search, rescue, ventilation, forcible entry, overhaul).
 - High-Point Anchor Rescue System: Specialized training utilizing ground/aerial ladders as elevated anchor points for controlled descents, upper-floor evacuations, and firefighter rescue operations.
-

3. Public Health & Community Assistance

Board of Health Data Evaluation Hearing

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) will present updates on the ongoing Town Wide Westminster Health Data Evaluation.

- **Meeting Date & Time:** Monday, November 16, 2026, at 6:30 PM.
- **Location:** Community Senior Center (69 West Main Street).

- **Inquiries:** Written questions must be submitted by **November 2, 2026**, to DPH-EnvEpi@mass.gov or by calling 617-624-5757 ext. 5.

Emergency Home Heating Assistance Program (EHHAP)

Instituted by the Select Board and administered via an appointed committee, EHHAP provides financial relief for home heating expenses.

- **Funding Sources:** The Fred Smith Poor Fund and the Giles Fund.
- **Eligibility Criteria:** Must be a Westminister resident for 6+ consecutive months and meet recent HUD low-income limits. Limit of one benefit per household per season.
- **Application Availability:** Applications become available **December 1** at the Senior Center and online.

Charitable & Community Donation Drives

- **Women's Fellowship Personal Care Drive (Nov 2 – Nov 20, 2026):** Collecting hygiene items not covered by SNAP benefits (bar soap, shampoo, toothpaste, lotions, razors, shaving cream) for the local Food Pantry at the First Congregational Church.
 - Drop-off Sites: First Congregational Church (138 Main St), Forrest Farms (127 Main St), The Vice (134 Main St), and Vincent's Country Store (109 Main St).
 - **First Congregational Church Holiday Door Swag Sale:**
 - Date/Time: Saturday, November 28, 2026, from 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM (Front steps, 138 Main St).
 - Cost: \$20 each. Pre-orders for matching sets must be placed by Nov 23 via Sammi Dawley (978-430-9359).
-

4. Community Events, Programming & Recreation

Key Upcoming Community Events

Event Name	Date / Time	Location	Program Details
Halloween Trick-or-Treating	Oct 31, 5:00–7:00 PM	Bacon, Pleasant, Elliott & Main Streets	Neighborhood trick-or-treating. Candy/donations accepted at Town Hall or Public Safety Building.
Forbush Haunted Library	Oct 31, 5:00–7:00 PM	Forbush Memorial Library	Spooky Halloween library activities held in conjunction with trick-or-treating.
Complimentary Halloween Photos	Oct 31, 5:00–7:00 PM	121 Main Street	Free photo sessions, crafts, and candy. Sponsored by The Brenda Albert Team (LAER Realty) & Kristen Smith.
Annual Halloween Bonfire	Oct 31, 7:00 PM	VFW Field	Community bonfire, food, drinks, and music following trick-or-treating.
Community Spaghetti Supper	Nov 12, 5:00–7:00 PM	Community Senior Center	Free dinner (pasta, meatballs, bread), background music, and kids' crafts. Westminster residents only; capped at first 100 RSVPs (RSVP by Nov 2).
Community Holiday Swap	Nov 18, 1:00–3:00 PM	Community Senior Center	Swap clean, gently used holiday decor and household items. No clothing, shoes, textiles, large appliances, or electronics.
Cornhole League	Mondays, 1:00–2:30 PM	Community Senior Center	Open to all ages and skill levels.

Forbush Memorial Library Youth Programming

- **Zumbini with Mindful Hearts Yoga:** Nov 4 & Nov 18, 10:00–10:45 AM (Ages 0–4). Sponsored by Friends of Forbush.
- **Read with TheraPAWS!:** Nov 20, 4:30–5:30 PM (Grades PreK+). Provided by BePAWSitive Therapy Pet team. In-person registration opens at 3:30 PM on the day of the event.

Community Services Staffing & Media Engagement

- **New Staffing:** The Senior Center introduced **Kailee**, who joins the team to expand social activities, community resources, and intergenerational programming.
- **Town Podcasts & Communications:**
 - Episode 35 (Town Crier Podcast): Town Clerk Jayne Davolio joins Stephanie Lahtinen to discuss voter registration and state elections.
 - Episode 36 (Town Crier Podcast): Town Administrator Stephanie Lahtinen outlines the Woodland Loop water main project, Select Board updates, and the Special Town Meeting.
- **Community Volunteering & Submissions:** Residents interested in volunteering for community programs or submitting ideas for The Sentinel or podcasts should contact Community Services Director **Audra Kirtland** at 978-874-7461 or akirtland@westminster-ma.gov, or email podcast@westminster-ma.gov.

=====

Beyond the Town Hall: 4 Surprising Lessons in Civic Innovation from Small-Town New England

How do modern small towns build genuine community connection and manage public resources in an era dominated by digital noise? While

tech-centric solutions often dominate political discourse, smaller municipalities are quietly developing creative, practical strategies to adapt public services and engage residents directly on the ground.

Take the town of Westminster, Massachusetts, as a compelling case study in unexpected civic vitality and public service adaptation. From municipal space redesign to public safety operations and grassroots support systems, recent updates from Westminster offer four counter-intuitive takeaways for modern local governance and community life.

Takeaway 1: Your Local Senior Center Might Secretly Be the Hottest Nightclub in Town

Westminster has recently launched a community initiative designed to reimagine its Community Senior Center as an all-ages social hub. Rather than restricting municipal facilities to narrow demographic silos, the town is actively using the center to bring residents of all generations together through inclusive, high-energy gatherings.

A prime example of this strategy was the town's Motown-themed Community Dance held on Friday, October 16th. Organizers completely transformed the Senior Center's social room into a Motown-inspired nightclub, featuring black-draped walls, soft lighting, beautifully decorated tables, a glowing Motown sign, and a twinkling blue ceiling over the dance floor. Over 60 guests attended—many styled in vintage Motown attire—and were out on the floor by the second song, keeping the space vibrant all evening.

Rethinking municipal assets by removing traditional age labels builds intergenerational trust and maximizes the public return on local infrastructure investment. When a municipal facility expands its scope beyond its traditional moniker, it evolves from a specialized venue into a resilient community anchor.

"...the Community Senior Center - which is NOT just for seniors!"

Takeaway 2: Engines vs. Ladders: The Hidden Division of Labor in Emergency Response

This spirit of municipal adaptability extends beyond social spaces and directly into emergency operations. On a fire ground, emergency responses are far from a free-for-all; safety and property conservation rely on a strictly coordinated division of labor between Engine Companies and Ladder Companies during tactical operations.

While Engine crews focus primarily on water supply, advancing hose lines, protecting exposures, and fire suppression, Ladder crews handle building access, search and rescue, ventilation (opening roofs and walls), forcible entry, and overhaul to check for hidden fire spread. Engine personnel extinguish flames, but Ladder crews create the critical access, atmospheric control, and search paths necessary for a safe and effective attack.

In major metropolitan fire departments, personnel specialize in a single apparatus role, but small-town departments must cross-train firefighters to master both complex functions seamlessly—building multi-disciplinary resilience and cost-effective operational capacity. This deep institutional dedication is epitomized by firefighter Tim Hurd, who retired on October 23rd after 43 plus years of uninterrupted service since joining in November 1982. Reaching mandatory retirement age as the 5th longest-serving member in department history, Hurd joins the legendary ranks of past department figures like Chief Brent MacAloney and Deputy Chief Jiggs Ahlin.

Takeaway 3: Bridging the "Hygiene Gap" Through Private Municipal Trusts and Local Fellowships

Just as small-town emergency services cross-train for operational resilience, local social safety nets must dynamically adapt to fill critical coverage gaps left by broader federal programs. For instance, federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits cannot be used to purchase basic everyday personal hygiene products like bar soap, shampoo, conditioner, toothpaste, mouthwash, toothbrushes, body lotion, or razors.

To bridge this "hygiene gap," grassroots local organizations step in with practical solutions. The Women's Fellowship of the First Congregational Church of Westminster organized a Personal Care

Donation Drive running from November 2 to November 20 to stock the Food Pantry located directly at the church (138 Main St.). To make giving easy, the Fellowship partnered with local small businesses—including Vincent's Country Store, The Vice, and Forrest Farms—to set up donation drop boxes across town.

Complementing these grassroots efforts, the Westminster Select Board addresses essential winter needs through historical private accounts like the Fred Smith Poor Fund and the Giles Fund via the Emergency Home Heating Assistance Program (EHHAP). Because general town fuel assistance applications do not open until December 1st, these historic private municipal funds allow local leaders to bypass bureaucratic red tape and provide immediate fuel relief during early winter freeze-outs.

Takeaway 4: The Zero-Dollar Economy of the Community Holiday Swap

Beyond emergency fuel funds and personal care drives, sustainable community care takes a highly accessible, zero-cost form through local resource sharing. On Wednesday, November 18th, from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM, the Senior Center will host the Westminster Community Holiday Swap, inviting residents to declutter gently used holiday decor and clean, working-condition household goods.

The defining rule of the event is its complete lack of financial or transactional barriers: residents do not need to bring items or trade in order to participate and take home items they need. By donating all unclaimed goods to charity or the town swap afterward, Westminster establishes a circular economy event that reduces seasonal household waste and builds community goodwill without administrative financial overhead.

"You don't need to bring anything to participate!"

Conclusion

Whether by turning senior centers into multi-generational event spaces, cross-training safety personnel for complex tactics, filling

welfare gaps through historic private trusts and grassroots care, or facilitating zero-cost resource sharing, small towns continue to offer powerful models for local public service. True civic innovation does not require massive budgets or technological overhauls; often, it simply requires rethinking how existing local assets and historic resources can best serve the entire community.

How might your own local community rethink its traditional municipal resources to foster deeper connection and mutual support?

=====

Town of Westminster Master Community Event & Municipal Schedule
(November 2026 & Beyond)

1. Executive Overview & Information Architecture

This comprehensive master schedule serves as an essential administrative tool and public resource designed to coordinate municipal operations, public health initiatives, civic governance, and community programming across the Town of Westminster. By systematically categorizing municipal deadlines, town governance milestones, public safety operational updates, social welfare programs, and seasonal celebrations, this document establishes a structured framework to enhance operational transparency and encourage civic participation. Clear information architecture bridges the gap between town administration and community members, ensuring that residents possess timely, actionable insights regarding key voting dates, tax obligations, public safety measures, and social enrichment opportunities.

An analysis of local administrative activities reveals a cohesive ecosystem driven by several recurring operational priorities:

- **Active Civic Governance & Democratic Participation:** Ensuring robust public engagement through accessible voter registration, transparent warrant reviews, and well-publicized town meetings.
- **Fiscal Compliance & Municipal Operations:** Maintaining structured timelines for tax collections, infrastructure

improvements (such as the Woodland Loop water main project), and municipal facility assessments.

- **Public Safety Readiness & Inter-Agency Collaboration:** Broadening traffic safety initiatives, advancing departmental training, updating emergency notification systems, and honoring dedicated personnel.
- **Seasonal Community Welfare & Support Systems:** Supporting vulnerable populations during winter months through fuel assistance, non-food hygiene supply drives, and charitable local partnerships.
- **Family Programming & Multi-Generational Community Engagement:** Offering low-barrier social gatherings, literacy initiatives, artistic expressions, and youth enrichment programs across local facilities.

To ensure community voices remain integral to town communications, residents are encouraged to share event announcements, municipal feedback, and ideas for the Town Crier Podcast directly with Town Administrator Stephanie Lahtinen via email at podcast@westminster-ma.gov. Additionally, the town extends its gratitude to the organizers of recent community successes, including the Cracker Festival and the Farmers Market, while announcing a Town Hall Call for Artists to exhibit local artwork within municipal spaces.

To ensure seamless navigation and administrative clarity, this document transitions directly into the foundational civic and electoral milestones that govern the municipality.

2. Civic Governance, Elections & Fiscal Deadlines

Civic administration relies on strict adherence to statutory deadlines, transparent legislative processes, accessible democratic channels, and fiscal compliance. State elections, municipal town meetings, Board of Health evaluations, and quarterly tax deadlines form the backbone of local governance in Westminister. Under the

administrative leadership of Westminster's first appointed Town Clerk, Jayne Davolio, timely public notification and clear procedural guidelines are prioritized to maintain regulatory compliance, fiscal health, and informed voter turnout.

Categorized Synthesis of Key Administrative Milestones

- **In-Person Early Voting Schedule Posting:** October 8, 2026. Official schedules detailing early voting hours and locations posted on the town website and by the Town Clerk's Office.
- **Select Board Meetings (Special Town Meeting Warrant Reviews):** October 5, 2026, and October 19, 2026. Formal reviews and public discussions surrounding draft warrant articles for the upcoming Fall Special Town Meeting.
- **State Election Voter Registration Deadline:** Saturday, October 24, 2026, by 5:00 PM. The mandatory cut-off date to register to vote for the State Election.
- **Vote by Mail & Absentee Ballot Application Deadline:** Thursday, October 27, 2026, by 5:00 PM. Cut-off deadline for submitting mail-in applications for Vote by Mail or Absentee ballots.
- **In-Person Absentee Voting Deadline:** Monday, November 2, 2026, at 12:00 PM. Final window for in-person absentee ballot voting at the Town Clerk's Office.
- **Select Board Warrant Approval Meeting:** Monday, November 2, 2026. The formal executive session during which the final Special Town Meeting Warrant is officially approved.
- **FY25 2nd Quarter Real Estate & Personal Property Tax Payment Deadline:** Monday, November 2, 2026. Mandatory tax payment deadline for property owners. FY25 2nd Quarter Real Estate and Personal Property Tax bills were mailed with the 1st Quarter bills last July and are due by Nov. 2, 2026.

- **Board of Health Written Questions Deadline:** Monday, November 2, 2026. Cut-off date for residents to submit written inquiries via email (DPH-EnvEpi@mass.gov) or phone ((617) 624-5757 ext. 5) regarding the ongoing town-wide health data evaluation prior to the public hearing.
- **Special Town Meeting Warrant Website Posting:** Tuesday, November 3, 2026. The approved warrant is published on the official town website (www.westminster-ma.gov) for public review.
- **Massachusetts State Election:** Tuesday, November 3, 2026. Polling date for state-wide elected offices and referendum measures.
- **Board of Health Meeting (DPH Health Data Evaluation):** Monday, November 16, 2026, at 6:30 PM. Held at the Community Senior Center (69 West Main St.). Representatives from the Department of Public Health (DPH) present updates on the ongoing Town Wide Westminster Health Data Evaluation and conduct a Q&A session.
- **Fall 2026 Special Town Meeting:** Tuesday, November 17, 2026, at 6:30 PM. Held at Westminster Elementary School (9 Academy Hill Road). Legislative assembly of town voters to deliberate and vote on warrant articles. For additional questions regarding the warrant, residents may contact Tamie Chiarelli at **978-874-7408** or via email at tchiarelli@westminster-ma.gov.

Impact Analysis & Resident Compliance Procedures

To remain in good administrative standing and exercise voting rights, residents must take specific actionable steps according to town guidelines:

1. **Voter Registration & Inquiries:** Eligible citizens may register to vote online, submit a mail-in form, or register in person at the Town Clerk's Office prior to the October 24 deadline. Resident voter status and registration details can be verified directly

through Town Clerk Jayne Davolio's office by calling **978-874-7406**.

2. Tax Obligation Fulfillment: Property owners must remit 2nd Quarter Real Estate and Personal Property Tax payments by November 2, 2026. If a bill is missing, residents should contact the Treasurer/Collector Office immediately. Payments can be completed:

- In Person: At Town Hall during posted counter hours (Monday 7:00 AM – 7:00 PM; Tuesday–Thursday 7:30 AM – 4:30 PM; cash or check only at counter; closed Fridays).
- After-Hours Drop Box: Located in front of Town Hall (locked drop box, checks only, payable to "Town of Westminster").
- Online: Via credit or debit card through the Online Payments link on www.westminster-ma.gov.

3. Public Health Engagement: Residents seeking clarification on the DPH Health Data Evaluation should submit written questions via email to DPH-EnvEpi@mass.gov or contact DPH at **(617) 624-5757 ext. 5** prior to November 2, or attend the November 16 presentation in person.

With administrative obligations clearly structured, civic participation extends beyond official votes into social gatherings that build town unity.

3. Community Celebrations, Seasonal Gatherings & Social Programs

Community-building initiatives, social programs, and public celebrations foster local connections, bridge generational divides, and optimize the utilization of municipal assets like the Westminster Community Senior Center and local public parks. Community Services Director Audra Kirtland coordinates local volunteer efforts and event programming; residents interested in volunteering or submitting community announcements may contact her at **978-874-7461** or

akirtland@westminster-ma.gov. Additionally, the Senior Center welcomes new staff member Kailee, who is joining the team to develop fresh social events, build vendor connections, and expand resources for residents of all ages.

Event Categorization & Retrospective Summaries

- **Motown-Themed Community Dance (Retrospective Highlight)**

- **Date & Time:** Friday, October 16, 2026
- **Location:** Community Senior Center Social Room (69 West Main St.)
- **Summary:** Over 60 guests attended this inaugural multi-generational evening event. The facility was transformed into a nightclub setting featuring black draped walls, soft lighting, a glowing Motown sign, and a twinkling blue ceiling. Attendees enjoyed nearly three hours of classic hits and music videos, establishing a baseline for expanded community-wide evening programs at the Senior Center.

- **Weekly Cornhole Gatherings**

- **Date & Time:** Every Monday, 1:00 PM – 2:30 PM
- **Location:** Westminster Community/Senior Center (69 West Main St.)
- **Summary:** Ongoing, open-level recreational activity designed for all ages and skill levels to promote informal social engagement.

- **Halloween Happenings**

- **Date & Time:** Saturday, October 31, 2026
- **Locations & Specific Schedule:**
 - **Neighborhood Trick-or-Treating:** 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM (Bacon, Pleasant, Elliott, and Main Streets open for

trick-or-treaters; supported by public candy donations collected at Town Hall and the Public Safety Building).

- **Complimentary Halloween Photos:** 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM (121 Main Street; featuring free photo shoots by Kristen Smith, crafts, and candy sponsored by the Brenda Albert Team / LAER Realty Partners; contact 978-621-3168).
 - **Forbush Haunted Library:** 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM (Forbush Memorial Library; spooky themed family activities running in conjunction with trick-or-treating).
 - **Annual Halloween Bonfire:** 7:00 PM (VFW Field; featuring a community bonfire, food, drinks, music, and family gatherings following neighborhood trick-or-treating).
- **Community Spaghetti Supper**
 - **Date & Time:** Thursday, November 12, 2026, 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM
 - **Location:** Community Senior Center (69 West Main Street)
 - **Summary:** Westminster's first-ever town spaghetti supper organized by Community Services. Includes pasta, meatballs, sauce, bread, background music, and a children's craft table. Free for Westminster residents, but strictly limited to the first 100 people to sign up (RSVP required by November 2). Voluntary donations to the Westminster Food Pantry are accepted.
 - **Community Holiday Swap**
 - **Date & Time:** Wednesday, November 18, 2026, 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM
 - **Location:** Community Senior Center Community Room (69 West Main Street)

- **Summary:** Sustainability and decluttering initiative allowing residents to drop off or browse for gently used holiday decorations and clean household goods in good working order. Unloading assistance is provided. Unclaimed items are donated to charity or the Westminster Swap. (Excludes large appliances, clothing, shoes, electronics, and textiles).
- **2nd Annual Holiday Door Swag Sale**
 - **Date & Time:** Saturday, November 28, 2026, 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM
 - **Location:** Front steps of the First Congregational Church (138 Main Street)
 - **Summary:** Seasonal fundraiser featuring fresh greenery door swags (\$20 each) decorated with ribbons. Organized by the First Congregational Church's Women's Fellowship. Pre-orders for custom matching greens/ribbons are due by Monday, November 23, by calling or texting Sammi Dawley at **978-430-9359**.

While public events foster vibrant social networks, dedicated assistance programs ensure vulnerable community members receive necessary seasonal support.

4. Social Services, Charitable Drives & Public Assistance

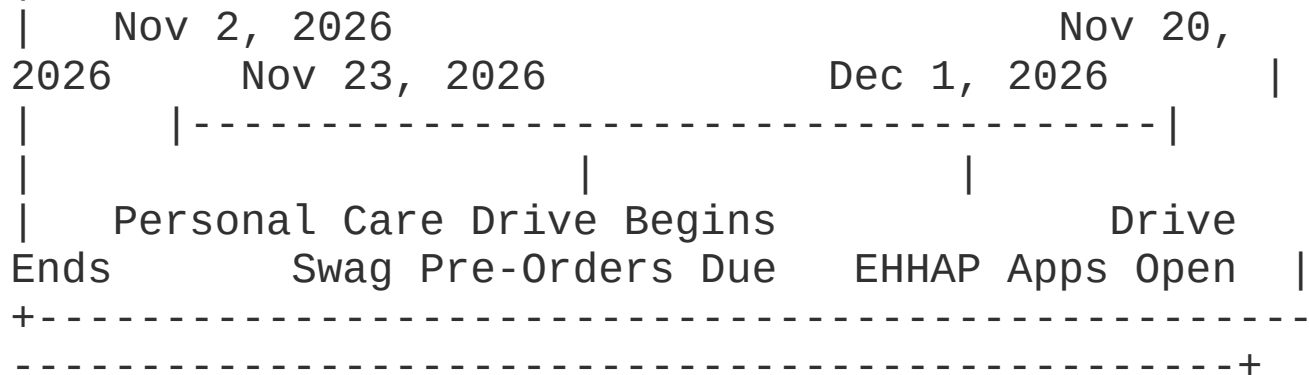
Town-sponsored relief initiatives, municipal social work, and civic partnerships mitigate seasonal hardship by addressing resource insecurity, heating assistance, and essential care supply gaps during winter months.

Strategic Program Summaries & Submission Deadlines

+-----
-----+

SEASONAL

ASSISTANCE TIMELINE



- **Personal Care Donation Drive (Lifting Lives Through Local Care):**
 - Operational Window: November 2, 2026 – November 20, 2026.
 - Organizing Body: Women's Fellowship of the First Congregational Church of Westminster.
 - Collection Locations: Designated collection boxes at First Congregational Church (138 Main St., side entrance), Forrest Farms (127 Main St., under covered ramp), The Vice (134 Main St.), and Vincent's Country Store (109 Main St.).
 - Targeted Supplies: Everyday hygiene items, including bar soap, body wash, shampoo, conditioner, toothpaste, toothbrushes, mouthwash, body/hand lotion, shaving cream, and razors.
- **Holiday Door Swag Pre-Order Deadline:**
 - Deadline: Monday, November 23, 2026.
 - Procedure: Pre-orders for custom matching greens/ribbons are submitted via phone/text to Sammi Dawley at **978-430-9359**.

- Beneficiary: All proceeds directly support the Women's Fellowship church and community mission programs.
- **Emergency Home Heating Assistance Program (EHHAP):**
 - Application Availability: Begins Tuesday, December 1, 2026.
 - Distribution Channels: Available in person at the Senior Center and online via the Town website (www.westminster-ma.gov).
 - Program Governance & Funding: Instituted by the Select Board and administered through the appointed Emergency Home Heating Assistance Committee. Program funding is drawn from the Fred Smith Poor Fund and the Giles Fund.
 - Eligibility Criteria: Applicants must have resided in Westminster for at least six consecutive months, meet HUD low-income guidelines for the area, and submit confidential financial disclosures. Eligible households receive one heating assistance grant per winter season.

Systemic Societal Impact

Local charitable initiatives address structural gaps in federal and state safety nets. Standard SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits explicitly prohibit the purchase of personal hygiene and household care products. The Women's Fellowship drive directly remedies this shortfall by supplying the local Food Pantry with non-food essentials. Similarly, the municipal EHHAP program provides immediate fuel assistance to low-income residents facing harsh winter conditions, ensuring basic domestic thermal safety through local trust funds.

Safeguarding residents requires combining social relief programs with effective municipal public safety operations.

5. Public Safety, Infrastructure & Departmental Milestones

Maintaining municipal safety relies on continuous operational training, public safety communications, traffic enforcement, and facility planning across the Police, Fire, and Public Works departments.

Departmental Synthesis & Operational Updates

- **Tim Hurd Retirement Send-Off:**

- Date & Event: Friday, October 23, 2026, at 9:00 AM.
- Service Legacy: Honored Firefighter Tim Hurd upon reaching mandatory retirement age after more than 43 years of continuous service (commencing November 17, 1982). Records confirm Hurd as the 5th longest-serving member in Westminster Fire Department history, following historical figures Gibby Parks, Deputy Chief Jiggs Ahlin, Chief Brent MacAloney, Chief Kevin Nivala, and Deputy Chief Charlie Clarkson.

- **State Road East School Zone Enforcement Initiative:**

- Context & Collaboration: Multi-agency coordination between Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School, MassDOT, Fitchburg Police, and Westminster Police resulted in the formal establishment of a designated school zone on State Road East (extending into Fitchburg).
- Enforcement Guidelines: Posted speed limits are reduced to **20 MPH** during peak school transit hours: **6:30 AM – 8:30 AM** and **2:00 PM – 4:00 PM**. Westminster police officers are executing a multi-week educational enforcement campaign focusing on motorist awareness and speed compliance.

- **Fire Department Ladder Company Operations & Rescue Systems Training:**

- Tactical Division of Labor: Westminster Fire Department training emphasizes functional operational differences between apparatus crews during structural incidents:

- Engine Companies: Responsible for fire suppression, water supply establishment, laying hose lines, advancing nozzles, and protecting exposure buildings.
- Ladder Companies: Responsible for search and rescue, structural ventilation, forced entry into secured areas, ground/aerial ladder placement, roof opening, overhaul, and utility control.
- High-Point Anchor Rescue Systems: Specialized training conducted on elevated ladder anchor systems, enabling controlled rappelling descents, upper-floor evacuations, and emergency firefighter rescues.
- **Public Safety Building Assessment Project:**
 - Project Milestone: The Public Safety Building Committee selected **Vertex** to conduct comprehensive facility and site assessment studies.
 - Scope of Work: Vertex will evaluate municipal public safety spatial needs, assist in selecting project architects, and analyze town-owned properties at **7-11 South Street** and **5 Meetinghouse Road** to determine site feasibility for a modern, functional public safety facility.
- **Emergency Communications Transition:**
 - System Upgrade: The town transitioned from Code Red to the **Everbridge Emergency Alert System** for critical public safety notifications, weather alerts, road closures, and utility maintenance. Resident data migrated automatically, but users must create an account at <https://member.everbridge.net/93013422375055/login> to customize alert channels (SMS, cell call, landline, email).
- **Community Philanthropy:**
 - VFW Donation: Westminster Police Department and Police Association members presented a \$700 donation check to the Westminster VFW Commander, raised through sales of

the department's commemorative 250th Anniversary Patches honoring United States Armed Forces veterans.

- **Infrastructure Upgrades:**

- Woodland Loop: Water main infrastructure construction is actively progressing under Town Administration and DPW oversight.

These departmental upgrades directly enhance traffic safety, shorten emergency response times, and prepare the municipality for long-term facility needs.

Alongside public safety infrastructure, early childhood literacy and library programs form a vital component of community well-being.

6. Forbush Memorial Library Youth & Children's Programming

Public library programming plays a fundamental role in early childhood development, promoting early literacy, sensory motor skills, and social integration in safe learning spaces. Beyond youth activities, Forbush Memorial Library offers diverse adult and family enrichment opportunities, including popular offerings such as Pasta Making and Painting Classes.

Activity Schedule & Program Parameters

- **Zumbini with Mindful Hearts Yoga:**

- Dates & Time: Wednesday, November 4, 2026, and Wednesday, November 18, 2026 | 10:00 AM – 10:45 AM.
- Target Audience: Children ages 0 to 4 with caregivers.
- Program Outline: High-energy movement, music, and physical play session designed for toddlers. Sponsored by the Friends of Forbush. Advance registration is suggested via forbushlibrary.org.

- **Read with TheraPAWS!:**

- Date & Time: Friday, November 20, 2026 | 4:30 PM – 5:30 PM.
- Target Audience: Children in Grades PreK and up.
- Program Outline: Literacy confidence program allowing young students to practice reading aloud to certified therapy pets provided by the BePAWSitive Therapy Pet team. Sponsored by the Friends of Forbush. In-person registration opens at the library precisely at 3:30 PM on the day of the event.

To assist residents and municipal administrators in tracking these diverse events, all scheduled activities are compiled into the master chronological timeline below.

7. Master Chronological Event Matrix

This consolidated timeline acts as a central reference guide for municipal officers, emergency responders, department heads, and residents. It details all municipal deadlines, governance sessions, community events, public health meetings, and library activities scheduled from October through December 2026.

Date & Time	Event / Milestone Name	Subject Matter Category	Location & Key Action/Deadline
Ongoing Mondays @ 1:00 PM – 2:30 PM	Weekly Cornhole Gatherings	Social Program	Senior Center (69 W. Main St.); Open weekly recreational cornhole sessions
Oct 5, 2026	Select Board STM Warrant Review	Governanc e	Town Hall; Executive review of draft warrant items
Oct 8, 2026	Early Voting Schedule Posting	Governanc e / Elections	Town Clerk's Office & Website posting of voting schedule

Oct 16, 2026	Motown Community Dance	Community Event	Senior Center; Retrospective community social gathering
Oct 19, 2026	Select Board STM Warrant Review	Governance	Town Hall; Second public review of Special Town Meeting warrant
Oct 23, 2026 @ 9:00 AM	Tim Hurd Retirement Send-Off	Public Safety	Fire Department; Recognition of 43+ years of fire service
Oct 24, 2026 by 5:00 PM	Voter Registration Deadline	Governance / Elections	Mandatory deadline to register for Massachusetts State Election
Oct 27, 2026 by 5:00 PM	Vote by Mail / Absentee Application Cut-Off	Governance / Elections	Final deadline to submit mail-in ballot applications
Oct 31, 2026 @ 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM	Trick-or-Treating	Community Event	Bacon, Pleasant, Elliott, and Main Streets
Oct 31, 2026 @ 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM	Complimentary Halloween Photos	Community Event	121 Main Street; Free photos, crafts, and candy
Oct 31, 2026 @ 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM	Forbush Haunted Library	Library / Youth	Forbush Memorial Library; Family Halloween activities
Oct 31, 2026 @ 7:00 PM	Annual Halloween Bonfire	Community Event	VFW Field; Community bonfire, refreshments, and music
Nov 2, 2026 by 12:00 PM	In-Person Absentee Voting Deadline	Governance / Elections	Town Clerk's Office; In-person absentee voting closes
Nov 2, 2026	Select Board	Governance	Town Hall; Final executive

	Meeting	e	approval of Special Town Meeting Warrant
Nov 2, 2026	FY25 Q2 Real Estate & Personal Tax Due	Fiscal Deadline	Town Hall / Online drop box; Quarterly tax payment deadline
Nov 2, 2026	Board of Health Question Submission Cut-Off	Public Health	Email DPH-EnvEpi@mass.gov / Call (617) 624-5757 x5; Written question deadline
Nov 2, 2026	Spaghetti Supper RSVP Deadline	Community Event	Senior Center; Cut-off to reserve attendance (limit 100)
Nov 2, 2026	Personal Care Drive Launch	Social Service	First Congregational Church, Forrest Farms, The Vice, Vincent's Store
Nov 3, 2026	Massachusetts State Election	Governance / Elections	Polling locations town-wide
Nov 3, 2026	STM Warrant Website Posting	Governance	www.westminster-ma.gov ; Approved warrant posted for public
Nov 4, 2026 @ 10:00 AM – 10:45 AM	Zumbini with Mindful Hearts Yoga	Library / Youth	Forbush Memorial Library; Ages 0-4 activity session
Nov 12, 2026 @ 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM	Community Spaghetti Supper	Community Event	Senior Center; Resident dinner & kids' crafts (RSVP required)
Nov 16, 2026 @ 6:30 PM	Board of Health Meeting (DPH Evaluation)	Public Health	Senior Center (69 W. Main St.); DPH health study presentation
Nov 17, 2026 @ 6:30 PM	Fall 2026 Special Town Meeting	Governance	Westminster Elementary School (9 Academy Hill Rd.)

Nov 18, 2026 @ 10:00 AM – 10:45 AM	Zumbini with Mindful Hearts Yoga	Library / Youth	Forbush Memorial Library; Ages 0-4 activity session
Nov 18, 2026 @ 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM	Community Holiday Swap	Community Event	Senior Center; Decor and household goods swap
Nov 20, 2026	Personal Care Donation Drive Concludes	Social Service	Final drop-offs at church and local business drop boxes
Nov 20, 2026 @ 4:30 PM – 5:30 PM	Read with TheraPAWS!	Library / Youth	Forbush Library; PreK+ reading session (Reg opens 3:30 PM)
Nov 23, 2026	Holiday Door Swag Pre-Order Deadline	Social Service / Event	Call/Text 978-430-9359; Pre-orders due for matching ribbons
Nov 28, 2026 @ 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM	2nd Annual Holiday Door Swag Sale	Community / Fundraiser	First Congregational Church front steps (138 Main St.)
Dec 1, 2026	EHHAP Heating Applications Open	Social Service	Senior Center / Town Website; Fuel assistance applications open

=====

Westminster has decommissioned the *Code Red* platform and partnered with **Everbridge** for emergency management and routine public notifications (e.g., severe weather, fires, floods, road closures, and water utility maintenance).

=====

Briefing Document: Westminster Municipal Governance, Special Town Meeting, and Administrative Updates

Executive Summary

This briefing document synthesizes municipal administrative updates provided by Westminster Town Administrator Stephanie Lahtinen on October 20. The primary focus of municipal governance centers on preparations for the **Special Town Meeting scheduled for November 17**, featuring a 15-article warrant addressing financial stabilization, public safety staffing, land appraisals, and zoning bylaw amendments.

Key administrative initiatives include the rollout of the "Going the Extra Mile" (GEM) employee recognition program, critical public health data updates from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (Mass DPH), and the commencement of Phase 1 construction for the privately funded Woodland Loop water main extension to address groundwater contamination. Additionally, the town is preparing for early voting and the November 3 State Election featuring a two-page ballot, alongside several community events managed by the newly established Community Services Department.

Select Board Meeting Actions & Administrative Business

The Select Board convened on October 19 to address routine governance, committee appointments, fee waivers, and internal program developments. Due to a technical broadcast failure, video was unavailable; however, an audio recording made via the Town Administrator's office was secured for public distribution via the town website and AWCM.

Financial Approvals and Fee Waivers

- **Accounts Payable Warrant:** Approved as part of routine financial operations.
- **Meeting Minutes:** Formal approval of the October 5 meeting minutes.
- **VFW Building Permit Fee Waiver:** Approved a request from the Westminster VFW Post—a local non-profit veteran services organization—to waive a **\$377 building permit fee** for an upcoming roof replacement project.

Board and Committee Personnel Changes

- **Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA):**
 - **Resignation:** Alan Tumley resigned as a full member.
 - **Appointment:** Associate member Von Salme was appointed to fill the full member vacancy.
 - **Current Opening:** One associate member position is now open. The ZBA operates with three full members and three associate members, requiring three members to sit for each hearing.
- **Conservation Commission:**
 - **Appointment:** Lynn Kelly was appointed to fill the seat vacated by Carrie Monty, who chose not to seek reappointment after years of service.
- **Parks and Recreation Committee:**
 - **Resignations:** Alison Haye and Michael Pers Valley resigned.
 - **Interim Measures:** Select Board Chair Mike Culie was appointed as Select Board liaison to the Parks and Recreation Committee to maintain oversight while active recruitment for open volunteer seats continues.

"Going the Extra Mile" (GEM) Employee Recognition Program

Following a town employee outing, the Select Board Chair directed the Town Administrator and HR Director to establish a formal employee recognition system. Westminster is adopting the **GEM Program model**, originally developed by the Town of Concord.

- **Purpose:** Recognizes town employees whose contributions improve the workplace, team dynamics, and overall community welfare.
- **Nomination Process:** Staff, elected officials, and appointed officials may submit nominations through an online form delivered to the Town Administrator's office.
 - **Rules:** Nominations must identify the nominator and detail the achievement/impact. Anonymous nominations and self-nominations are strictly prohibited.

- **Award Structure:** All nominees receive internal recognition. Quarterly, the employee with the most nominations receives an "Employee of the Quarter Going the Extra Mile Recognition Certificate" during a public Select Board meeting.
- **Eligibility Rule:** Employees may be nominated repeatedly but can only win the quarterly certificate **once within a 12-month period**.

Analysis of Special Town Meeting Warrant (November 17)

The warrant for the November 17 Special Town Meeting closed on October 9, establishing a final draft list of **15 articles**. The warrant will be officially posted on **Monday, November 2** (satisfying the 14-day legal requirement), followed by a town-wide postcard distribution. The meeting will take place at **6:30 PM at Westminster Elementary School**.

Special Town Meeting Article Breakdown

Article #	Category	Core Purpose & Scope	Funding / Source Details
Article 1	Finance	Placeholder to authorize payment of prior fiscal year bills.	\$0 (No current prior-year bills identified). Amount To Be Determined (Awaiting Free Cash certification).
Article 2	Finance	Transfer to Capital Stabilization Fund.	Amount To Be Determined (Awaiting Free Cash certification).
Article 3	Finance	Transfer to Pension Stabilization Fund.	Amount To Be Determined (Awaiting Free Cash certification).
Article 4	Finance	Transfer to Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) Fund.	Amount To Be Determined (Awaiting Free Cash certification).
Article 5	Public Safety /	Reallocates existing funds from Town Hall and Fire Department	\$200,000 reallocated from Public Safety

	Capital	parking improvements to design and bidding for the Public Safety Building.	Building Committee funds.
Article 6	Social Services	Authorizes funding for the Emergency Home Heating Assistance Program, bridging gaps prior to federal fuel assistance (program opens Dec 1).	\$20,000 transferred from the Giles Fund trust/endowment.
Article 7	Land / Recreation	Authorizes a professional appraisal of Parcel D (abutting Crocker Pond Recreation Area, currently privately owned) to assess acquisition costs.	\$8,000 (Follow-up to Aug 4 Special Town Meeting; does not commit town to purchase).
Article 8	Staffing	Establishes a full-time Fire Captain position in the Fire Department.	Municipal Budget / Proposed Grant
Article 9	Staffing	Establishes a full-time Police Officer position in the Police Department.	COPS Hiring Grant application pending (Chief LM).
Article 10	Staffing	Establishes a full-time Police Sergeant position in the Police Department.	COPS Hiring Grant application pending (Chief LM). **\$35,340**
Article 11	Public Safety Training	Funds paramedic training and certification for two newly hired full-time firefighters.	transferred from ambulance receipts (<\$20,000 per firefighter).
Article 12	Local Governance	Formalizes the Historical Commission in town bylaws, defining membership, appointments, preservation duties, and inter-board coordination.	Bylaw creation (Gives permanent legal framework to existing commission).
Article 13	Zoning / MBTA	Amends the existing MBTA Communities Bylaw by removing maximum parking restrictions in the multi-family overlay district	Bylaw Amendment.

		based on state feedback.	
Article 14	Zoning	Defines "data centers" in town zoning bylaws and explicitly prohibits their operation across all zoning districts.	Zoning Bylaw Prohibition.
Article 15	Governance / Traffic	Amends and corrects layout descriptions for Pleasant Street regarding truck exclusion language approved at the last Annual Town Meeting.	Language Correction.

Infrastructure, Public Health, and Regulatory Developments

1. Woodland Loop Water Main Extension

- **Context:** A privately funded infrastructure project executed via an agreement signed by the DPW Commission to address groundwater contamination within the Whitmanville / Beech Hill / MassNatural PFAS contamination zone.
- **Affected Areas:** Written notices were issued on October 16 to property owners on:
 - Woodland Drive
 - Oakwood Court
 - Tamax Road
 - Amber Road
 - Select properties on South Ashburnham Road
- **Construction Schedule:**
 - *Phase 1:* Construction commences late October.
 - *Home Connections:* Projected for **May and June 2027** due to winter street-opening restrictions.
- **Financial Terms:** Impacted residents may connect to town water at **zero connection cost**, but will assume standard water usage charges upon connection.

- **Public Outreach:** An informational Zoom meeting will be scheduled shortly. DPW Director Josh Hall is serving as the primary contact point (978-874-5572).

2. Mass DPH Townwide Health Data Evaluation

- **Meeting Schedule:** Representatives from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (Mass DPH) will attend the Board of Health meeting on **November 16 at 4:30 PM** at the Westminster Community Senior Center.
- **Objective:** Present findings regarding ongoing townwide health data evaluations and respond to resident inquiries.
- **Public Participation:** Town-wide notices will be issued. Residents may submit questions prior to **November 2** via email to dph-vias@state.ma.us or by phone at 617-624-5757 ext 5.

3. Adams Street 40B Comprehensive Permit Proposal

- **Public Hearing Update:** A public hearing was held on October 20 at 6:00 PM at the Senior Center.
- **Schedule Extension:** Contrary to early notices stating hearings would wrap up in October, the official hearing schedule has been extended through **December 31, 2026**.
- **Access:** Proceedings are recorded and accessible through the local cable studio or Zoom/Teams audio recordings.

Elections, Community Services, and Cultural Programs

State Election & Early Voting (November 3)

- **Polling Location & Hours:** Tuesday, November 3, from 7:00 AM to 8:00 PM at the Community Senior Center.
- **Ballot Details:** The election features a **two-page ballot** containing nine statewide questions. Election officials stress that mail-in and in-person

voters must return **both physical pages**, even if sections are left blank, to ensure accurate processing.

- **Information Handbooks:** Information booklets distributed by the state are available at Town Hall in standard and large-print formats.
- **In-Person Early Voting Schedule (Town Hall):**
 - *Mondays:* 7:00 AM – 7:00 PM
 - *Tuesdays – Thursdays:* 7:30 AM – 4:30 PM
 - *Saturday, October 24:* 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM
 - *Note:* No early voting on Fridays (including Oct 23) or Sundays.

Community Services Initiatives

- **Downtown Trick-or-Treat (October 31):** Scheduled from 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM across downtown streets (including closures on Bacon Street and Pleasant Street), followed by a bonfire at VFW Field. The town is actively soliciting candy donations (contact Audra Kirtland: akirtland@westminster-ma.gov) to assist residents on high-traffic streets.
- **Inaugural Community Spaghetti Supper (November 12):** Hosted by the newly independent Community Services Department from 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM at the Senior Center.
 - *Cost/Details:* Free to Westminster residents; includes pasta, meatballs, sauce, bread, live background music, and children's crafts.
 - *Capacity & RSVP:* Limited to the first **100 residents**. Mandatory RSVP deadline is **November 2** for catering procurement.
- **Little Art Gallery 2027 Exhibition Calendar:** The Westminster Cultural Council is accepting applications for two-dimensional art (paintings, drawings, photography, mixed media) from artists in Westminster and surrounding communities.
 - *Structure:* Six 2-month exhibition periods inside the Town Hall foyer.
 - *Fees:* Free to exhibit.

- **Deadline:** Priority application deadline is **December 13**. Applications are accessible on the Cultural Council page of the town website.

Critical Upcoming Municipal Dates

Date	Time / Deadline	Event / Action Item	Location / Contact
October 24	9:00 AM – 5:00 PM	In-Person Early Voting	Westminster Town Hall
Late October	N/A	Woodland Loop Water Main Construction Starts	Impacted streets (Woodland, Oakwood, Tamax, Amber, S. Ashburnham)
October 31	5:00 PM – 7:00 PM	Downtown Trick-or-Treat & VFW Field Bonfire	Downtown Streets / VFW Field
November 2	Pre-Meeting / Statutory	Special Town Meeting Warrant Formally Posted	Town Website & Public Posting Locations
November 2	End of Day	Mass DPH Question Submission Deadline	dph-vias@state.ma.us / 617-624-5757 ext 5
November 2	End of Day	RSVP Deadline for Community Spaghetti Supper	Audra Kirtland (akirtland@westminster-ma.gov)
November 3	7:00 AM – 8:00 PM	State Election Day	Westminster Community Senior Center
November 12	5:00 PM – 7:00 PM	Inaugural Free Community Spaghetti Supper	Community Senior Center (Max 100 people)
November 16	4:30 PM	Mass DPH Board of Health Evaluation Meeting	Community Senior Center
November	6:30 PM	Special Town	Westminster Elementary School

r 17		Meeting	
December 13	Priority Deadline	Cultural Council Little Art Gallery Applications	Town Hall Art Gallery Calendar 2027
Dec 31, 2026	Hearing Cutoff	Extended Public Hearing Schedule for Adams St 40B	Zoning Board of Appeals
May–June 2027	Operational	Home Connections for Woodland Loop Water Main	DPW Director Josh Hall (978-874-5572)

=====

5 Unexpected Insights into How Small-Town Governance Really Works: Lessons from Westminster

How do modern municipal governments balance high-tech disruption, environmental crises, and community cohesion on a local level? While national politics commands headlines, small towns encounter complex policy challenges daily—navigating everything from capital stewardship and regulatory strategy to workforce morale.

In a recent administrative update on Westminster Town Crier Episode 36, Town Administrator **Stephanie Latin** offered a comprehensive look inside the municipal strategy of **Westminster, Massachusetts** as it prepares for its fall business season. By examining Westminster’s latest administrative maneuvers, we can extract five impactful takeaways that demonstrate how proactive local governance operates behind the scenes to maintain civic resilience and municipal self-determination.

1. Preemptive Zoning: Banning Data Centers Before They Arrive

Small towns frequently find themselves in a reactive position when commercial developers propose high-impact projects. Westminster is taking a preemptive stance on industrial land use to protect its civic infrastructure before developer pressures emerge.

Under **Article 14** of the upcoming **November 17th Special Town Meeting** warrant, the town is addressing a critical regulatory void. Westminster's existing zoning bylaws currently lack a formal definition for "**data centers.**" Article 14 establishes an explicit definition for data centers within the municipal code while simultaneously prohibiting their operation across **all zoning districts.**

This policy move directly targets the unique operational strains data centers place on local communities—namely massive power grid draws and heavy water cooling demands. By establishing clear regulatory boundaries before an enterprise submits a formal application, Westminster protects its natural and built resources.

This assertive approach to land-use autonomy is complemented by **Article 13**, which adjusts the town's **MBTA Communities bylaw** by removing maximum parking restrictions in multifamily overlay districts based on state feedback. Together, these warrant articles showcase how small-town administrators continuously recalibrate local bylaws to balance state mandates with local self-determination.

2. Environmental Accountability: Private Water Main Extensions for PFAS Contamination

Ensuring public safety and environmental health requires nimble coordination between public agencies and private developers. In response to groundwater contamination within the **Bickford Hill Mass Natural PFAS contamination area**, Westminster's Department of Public Works (DPW) Commission signed an agreement to begin Phase 1 construction for the **Woodland Loop water main extension.**

This infrastructure extension is being constructed privately to directly remediate local drinking water quality. The project encompasses several residential corridors:

- **Woodland Drive**
- **Oakwood Court**

- **Tamax Road**
- **Amber Road**
- Portions of **South Ashburnham Road**

Under the terms of the agreement, affected property owners may connect to the municipal water system at **no connection cost**, absorbing only standard water usage fees post-connection. Because seasonal frost restricts street excavation during winter, service connections to homes are scheduled for **May and June 2027**.

To maintain civic transparency, DPW Director **Josh Hall** serves as the primary municipal point of contact for infrastructure inquiries. Additionally, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) will present updates on an ongoing townwide health data evaluation during the Board of Health meeting on **November 16th** at 4:30 p.m. at the Senior Center. Residents can submit advance questions to the DPH by **November 2nd** via email or phone.

3. Combating Municipal Burnout: The "Going the Extra Mile" (GEM) Program

Public sector administration requires managing heavy regulatory loads and public scrutiny, making employee retention and workplace culture vital operational concerns. To combat municipal burnout and foster peer appreciation, Westminster adapted an internal administrative initiative directly from the **Town of Concord**.

Titled the **Going the Extra Mile (GEM)** program, this initiative establishes a structured peer-recognition framework. Municipal staff, elected officials, and appointed board members submit nominations via an online portal to highlight colleagues whose service advances their team or the broader community. To maintain organizational integrity, self-nominations and anonymous submissions are strictly prohibited.

Submitted nominations are acknowledged internally each month. Every quarter, the employee who receives the highest volume of peer nominations is awarded an **"Employee of the Quarter"** certificate during a publicly broadcast Select Board meeting. To distribute recognition equitably across municipal departments, individual staff members can receive the quarterly award only once every **12 months**.

Reflecting on the role of morale in administrative performance, Town Administrator Stephanie Latin highlighted the broader impact of workforce recognition:

"Recognizing our staff for the good hard work that they do every day is not only going to be good for our organization, but also good for the community because, you know, good energy spreads around quicker than bad."

4. Local Safety Nets: Leveraging Endowments for Energy Cost Inflation

Spiking prices across **electricity, heating oil, propane, and natural gas** routinely impose severe economic strain on households entering the winter season. While federal and state fuel grants provide broad assistance, municipal governments often need responsive mechanisms to close emergency funding gaps for vulnerable residents.

Westminster addresses this seasonal squeeze through **Article 6** of its Special Town Meeting warrant, which authorizes a **\$20,000 transfer from the Giles Fund** to support the town's Emergency Home Heating Assistance Program ahead of its **December 1st** opening.

Rather than relying exclusively on external government grants, Westminster utilizes this targeted program as an agile, municipal catch-all. Funded through historical local trust funds and private endowments stewarded by the town over generations, the program

demonstrates how small towns can mobilize historical financial assets to cushion residents against contemporary inflationary spikes.

5. Hyper-Local Community Building: Free Spaghetti Suppers and Municipal Art

While zoning bylaws and capital budgets constitute the structural core of municipal administration, civic trust is built through accessible, human-scaled community programming. Westminster leverages low-cost, grassroots initiatives to strengthen local connections:

- **Hosting the First-Ever Community Spaghetti Supper:** Organized by the newly established Community Services Department, this free event takes place on **November 12th** from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Senior Center. Capped at the first **100 RSVPs** (with a sign-up deadline of **November 2nd**), the supper offers families a mid-week break complete with pasta, meatballs, salad, bread, background music, and children's craft activities.
- **Curating The Little Art Gallery:** Situated inside the Town Hall welcome center, this space features rotating **2-month exhibits** showcasing two-dimensional work from local artists and creative groups. Operating with **zero exhibition fees**, the gallery removes financial barriers for creators while bringing cultural vibrancy into the primary seat of local government.
- **Mobilizing Volunteer Networks:** These official programs complement a vibrant volunteer ecosystem—from the annual **Cracker Festival** and Agricultural Commission Farmers Market to neighborhood efforts hosting **2,500 trick-or-treaters** along **Bacon Street** and **Pleasant Street** on **October 31st** (from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., followed by the annual VFW Field bonfire).

Conclusion

As Westminster enters a pivotal fall business season—marked by the **November 3rd election** featuring a comprehensive **two-page ballot** and the **November 17th Special Town Meeting**—its administrative updates offer a clear blueprint for modern civic management. Small-town resilience does not happen by accident; it requires a deliberate balance of preemptive land-use regulation, strategic public health investments, prudent trust fund allocation, and consistent workplace appreciation.

How does your own municipal government balance long-term infrastructure planning with everyday community building?

=====

Westminster Community Digest: Your Friendly Guide to Civic Life & Local Updates

1. Welcome & Local Wins: Celebrating Civic Spirit

Welcome to the Westminster Community Digest! As your guide to local civic life, our goal is to demystify municipal operations, highlight civic successes, and empower every resident to actively shape our town's future. Small towns run on human energy, and nowhere is that vibrant civic spirit more visible than in our volunteer-driven initiatives.

This autumn, Westminster celebrated two major community milestones:

- **11th Annual Cracker Festival:** Organized by the dedicated volunteers of the Westminster Village Foundation, this beloved tradition brought crowds downtown for a crisp fall day of live music, delicious food, and neighborly connection.
- **Agricultural Commission Farmers Market Season Wrap-Up:** On October 16th, our volunteer-run Agricultural Commission closed out another spectacular summer season. Renowned as one of the largest and best-attended markets in the region, its weekly operation requires months of sustained logistical planning.

Volunteer-run events are the heartbeat of small-town life. Beyond bringing joy, these efforts deliver tangible civic benefits: they drive downtown foot traffic to support local business owners, sustain regional agriculture, and

reduce municipal service costs by providing public programming through grassroots community passion.

Select Board News & VFW Support

During the October 19 Select Board meeting, municipal transparency remained a priority. A minor technical issue prevented the live television broadcast, but Town Administrator Stephanie Latin manually recorded a full audio file via phone voice note, ensuring the public could access the complete audio recording on the town website and AWCN.

In a concrete demonstration of civic partnership, the Select Board voted to waive a \$377 building permit fee for the Westminster VFW post's upcoming roof replacement. As a non-profit veteran services organization and vital community partner, the VFW directly benefits from this municipal fee relief as they preserve their local hall.

New Employee Recognition: The GEM Program

To foster that same dedication within town hall operations, the Select Board—guided by recommendations from the HR Director and Town Administrator—is launching the **"Going the Extra Mile" (GEM) Employee Recognition Program**. Adapted from a successful municipal model in Concord, the GEM program establishes a structured process to honor public employees who demonstrate exemplary service.

Program Feature	Details & Rules	Impact / Purpose
Eligibility & Nominations	Open to all municipal staff and elected/appointed officials via an online form submitted directly to the Town Administrator.	Encourages peer-to-peer and public recognition of staff who improve the workplace, support team goals, and serve residents.
Submission Requirements	Nominators must identify themselves and detail the specific achievement and its positive impact. <i>No self-nominations or anonymous submissions allowed.</i>	Ensures complete transparency, authenticity, and meaningful accountability for special recognition.
Quarterly	All nominees are recognized	Elevates public sector

Recognition	internally. The employee with the most nominations in a 3-month cycle receives a GEM Certificate publicly at a broadcast Select Board meeting.	morale and highlights exemplary municipal service publicly across the community.
Award Limits	Employees may be nominated repeatedly, but can only win the quarterly award once within any 12-month window.	Ensures fair recognition opportunities across all municipal departments and job titles throughout the year.

While grassroots celebrations and employee awards highlight our town's community spirit, that energy shifts naturally into formal governance when residents step up to serve on regulatory boards.

2. Civic Action Spotlight: Town Board Openings & Volunteer Opportunities

To help you navigate recent leadership shifts across our town boards, here is what you need to know about who is stepping up—and where we need your help. Local boards and commissions handle critical oversight regarding land policy, environmental protection, and recreational infrastructure. When vacancies arise, engaged residents are needed to step forward so municipal business proceeds without interruption.

- **Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA):** Following the resignation of full member Alan Tumley (thanked for his dedicated service), associate member von Salme was appointed to a full member role. This leaves an opening for an **Associate Member**.
 - *Educational Note:* ZBA decisions require a strict 3-member sitting panel (*quorum*—the minimum number of members legally required to conduct official business) for every single public hearing. Associate members serve a vital "fill-in" role, preventing hearing cancellations and costly development delays when full members are recused or absent. Interested residents can apply by emailing podcast@westminster-ma.gov.

- **Conservation Commission:** Lynn Kelly has been appointed to the commission, filling the seat vacated by Carrie Monty. The town extends its deep gratitude to Carrie Monty for her many years of dedicated volunteer service protecting Westminster's wetlands and natural resources.
- **Parks & Recreation Committee:** Following the resignations of Alison Haye and Michael Pers Valley (thanked for their service), Select Board Chair Mike Cuellie has been temporarily appointed as Select Board Liaison to the committee. This liaison structure maintains administrative continuity and keeps recreational programming running while new volunteers are recruited.

💡 How to Get Started as a Civic Volunteer

Interested in serving your town but unsure where your skills fit best? Follow these simple steps:

1. **Explore Vacancies:** Visit the front page of the town website (westminster-ma.gov) and click the "Board and Committee Vacancies" tab to see all current openings.
2. **Discuss Commitments:** Reach out directly to Town Administrator Stephanie Latin via email (podcast@westminster-ma.gov) to discuss time commitments, meeting schedules, and expectations.
3. **Get Appointed:** Match your unique talents with an open seat in land use, recreation, historical preservation, or public safety!

Volunteer board oversight directly shapes the capital investments, zoning bylaws, and official warrant articles presented to residents at Town Meetings.

3. Demystifying the November 17 Special Town Meeting Warrant
The Special Town Meeting will convene on **Monday, November 17 at 6:30 PM at Westminster Elementary School**. The draft warrant closed on October 9 with 15 proposed articles.

To help residents understand what is being voted on and why it matters, these 15 articles are organized into four clear thematic categories below:

Financial Management & Stabilization

- **Article 1 (Prior Year Bills):** A standard placeholder article allowing the town to pay older fiscal year bills if any surface prior to the meeting.
 - *Educational Context:* Massachusetts municipal finance law strictly requires a 4/5ths majority (or unanimous) vote at Town Meeting to spend current-year appropriations on past fiscal year obligations.
- **Articles 2, 3, & 4 (Stabilization Fund Transfers):** Authorizes funding transfers from *certified free cash* into the Capital Stabilization Fund (Article 2), Pension Stabilization Fund (Article 3), and Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) Fund (Article 4).
 - *Educational Context:* "Certified free cash" represents unencumbered surplus funds remaining from the prior fiscal year after accounting for all liabilities. Routing free cash into specialized stabilization funds protects Westminster's credit rating and builds rainy-day financial resilience. ("OPEB" refers to healthcare and non-pension benefits earned by retired municipal employees.)

Community Health, Safety & Infrastructure Grants

- **Article 5 (Public Safety Building Design):** Reallocates \$200,000 previously appropriated for Town Hall and Fire Department parking improvements directly toward the design and bidding phases for a new Public Safety Building.
- **Article 6 (Emergency Home Heating Assistance):** Transfers \$20,000 from the Giles Fund trust to replenish the town's Emergency Home Heating Assistance Program. With rising heating oil, natural gas, propane, and electricity costs, this trust transfer serves as a crucial bridge for local families before federal fuel assistance applications open on December 1st.

- **Articles 8, 9, & 10 (Public Safety Staffing Expansion):** Establishes three full-time public safety positions: 1 Fire Captain (Article 8), 1 Police Officer (Article 9), and 1 Police Sergeant (Article 10). The police positions support active applications for federal COPS hiring grants submitted by Chief LM.
- **Article 11 (Paramedic Certification Training):** Transfers \$35,340 from ambulance receipts to cover specialized paramedic certification training for two newly hired full-time firefighters (~\$20,000 per person), elevating the department's emergency medical capabilities.

Land Use, Environment & Bylaw Governance

- **Article 7 (Crocker Pond Parcel Appraisal):** Authorizes \$8,000 for a professional appraisal of Parcel D—a privately owned parcel abutting the Crocker Pond Recreation Area.
 - *Educational Context:* This follows up on the August 4th Special Town Meeting. Paying for an appraisal does *not* commit the town to buying the land; it arms voters with precise market valuation data before considering future recreation expansion.
- **Article 12 (Historical Commission Bylaw):** Establishes a formal town bylaw defining the membership, appointment structure, preservation duties, and inter-board coordination for the Historical Commission. While an active commission currently operates, passing this bylaw grants it permanent legal standing within municipal code.
- **Article 13 (MBTA Communities Bylaw Amendment):** Adjusts the parking language within the MBTA Communities multi-family *overlay district* passed last year by removing maximum parking limits based on state compliance feedback.
 - *Educational Context:* An "overlay district" is a special zoning tool layered over existing zoning to allow specific housing types without changing the underlying base zoning.

- **Article 14 (Data Center Zoning Prohibition):** Formally defines "data centers" within town zoning bylaws and explicitly prohibits their construction across all zoning districts in Westminster.
- **Article 15 (Truck Exclusion Language Correction):** Amends a minor verbiage error regarding the physical layout description of Pleasant Street in the truck exclusion language adopted at the recent Annual Town Meeting.

Key Warrant Milestones

- **November 2:** Official posting of the final warrant (satisfying the required 14-day public notice rule) and dispatch of an informational postcard mailer to all resident households.

Comprehensive Warrant Quick-Reference Guide

Article #	Focus Area	Proposed Action / Funding Source	Primary Benefit to Resident
Art. 1	Finance	Pay prior year bills (Placeholder)	Ensures legal compliance for past obligations.
Art. 2	Finance	Transfer Free Cash to Capital Stabilization	Builds savings for future equipment & buildings.
Art. 3	Finance	Transfer Free Cash to Pension Stabilization	Protects long-term municipal pension liabilities.
Art. 4	Finance	Transfer Free Cash to OPEB Fund	Reserves funds for retiree health obligations.
Art. 5	Public Safety	Reallocate \$200k from parking funds	Advances architectural design for Public Safety Building.
Art. 6	Social Services	Transfer \$20k from Giles Fund	Supplies winter heating aid before federal aid opens Dec 1.
Art. 7	Recreation	\$8,000 for Parcel D appraisal	Evaluates expansion options for Crocker Pond area.
Art. 8	Staffing	Create 1 Fire Captain position	Strengthens fire department command structure.
Art. 9	Staffing	Create 1 Police Officer position	Expands police force (tied to federal COPS grant).

Art. 10	Staffing	Create 1 Police Sergeant position	Enhances supervisory staffing (tied to COPS grant).
Art. 11	Emergency Services	Transfer \$35,340 from ambulance receipts	Upgrades 2 newly hired firefighters to Paramedics.
Art. 12	Governance	Establish Historical Commission Bylaw	Gives permanent legal standing to historical preservation.
Art. 13	Zoning	Remove MBTA overlay parking maximums	Aligns local zoning with state MBTA housing compliance.
Art. 14	Zoning	Define & prohibit data centers	Prevents data center development in all town districts.
Art. 15	Governance	Correct Pleasant St truck exclusion text	Fixes layout description in traffic safety regulation.

Beyond town-wide voting decisions at Town Meeting, ongoing municipal operations include major infrastructure construction and environmental health evaluations.

4. Essential Updates: Infrastructure, Public Health, and Local Development Woodland Loop Water Main Extension

In response to groundwater contamination identified in the **Bean Porch Hill Mass Natural PFAS contamination area**, private construction of a public water main extension is scheduled to begin in late October.

- **Affected Streets:**
 - Woodland Drive
 - Oakwood Court
 - Talamax Road
 - Amber Road
 - Select portions of South Ashburnham Road
- **Key Details & Timelines:** Official notices were mailed to impacted property owners on October 16. Phase 1 main-line street construction begins late October. However, individual home connections will take place in **May and June 2027**.

- *Why the delay?* Severe winter frost prohibitions prevent street excavation for individual water service tie-ins between late autumn and early spring.
- Impacted property owners have the option to connect to clean town water with **zero connection fee** (standard water usage charges apply once connected). An informational resident meeting will be hosted on Zoom shortly. Questions can be directed to DPW Director Josh Hall at 978-874-5572. Expect localized construction traffic delays.

Mass DPH Health Data Evaluation

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) will attend the Board of Health meeting on **Monday, November 16 at 4:30 PM** at the Westminster Community Senior Center to present findings on the ongoing town-wide health data evaluation and answer community questions.

- **Submitting Questions:** Residents can submit health evaluation questions to state officials in advance (due by **November 2**):
 - **Email:** dph-vias@state.ma.us
 - **Phone:** 617-624-5757 ext 5

Adams Street 40B Hearing Extension

Public hearings regarding the Adams Street housing proposal are continuing.

- *Educational Context:* **Chapter 40B** is a Massachusetts state statute that enables developers to bypass local zoning restrictions if a town's housing stock is below 10% affordable, provided the proposed development includes designated affordable units.
- The hearing schedule for Adams Street has been formally extended through **December 31, 2026**. While some hearings are conducted via Zoom or Teams rather than traditional AWCM television broadcasts, full audio is captured so residents can clearly follow all proceedings and board deliberations.

Staying informed on these long-term infrastructure and public health updates equips residents to perform their most vital civic duty: casting an informed vote.

5. Voter's Guide: State Election Preparation (November 3)

The State Election takes place on **Tuesday, November 3**. Polls will be open from **7:00 AM to 8:00 PM** at the **Westminster Community Senior Center**.

Critical Voting Checklist

- **The Mandatory 2-Page Ballot Rule:** Due to approximately 9 state ballot questions, this year's ballot consists of **two separate physical sheets of paper** (spanning a front, back, and third page). *Voters must feed both physical pages into the tabulator at the polls or return both pages in mail-in packets*, even if one page is left completely blank, to ensure proper processing.
- **State Question Information Booklets:** Red state-issued voter booklets detailing all 9 ballot questions are available at the Town Hall information booth in both standard and large print.

Early Voting Schedule (Town Hall)

In-person early voting is available at Town Hall leading up to Election Day:

Day	Hours	Notes
Monday	7:00 AM – 7:00 PM	Extended evening voting hours
Tuesday – Thursday	7:30 AM – 4:30 PM	Standard Town Hall business hours
Saturday (Oct 24)	9:00 AM – 5:00 PM	Designated weekend voting window
Fridays & Sundays	<i>CLOSED</i>	No early voting on Fridays or Sundays

For voter registration questions, ballot verification, or detailed election procedures, contact Town Clerk Jane Devolio's office at 978-874-7406 (or listen to podcast Episode 35 for a complete breakdown).

While voting shapes local leadership and state laws, community social gatherings provide warm, informal spaces to build friendships and strengthen town unity.

6. Community Gathering Place: Events, Arts & Important Dates

Local Community Events

- **Downtown Trick-or-Treat & Bonfire (October 31):** Downtown streets (Bacon Street and Pleasant Street) will close to vehicle traffic from **5:00 PM to 7:00 PM** for neighborhood trick-or-treating (expecting over 2,500 visitors!), followed by a community bonfire at VFW Field. Candy donation drop-offs are being accepted at Town Hall and the Police Department to support street residents. Contact Audra Kirtland at akirtland@westminster-ma.gov to donate or participate.
- **First-Ever Community Spaghetti Supper (November 12):** Spearheaded by Westminster's newly established, independent Community Services Department, this free family dinner takes place from **5:00 PM to 7:00 PM** at the Senior Center (69 West Main Street). Framed around giving busy families a warm, stress-free night off from cooking dinner, the event features pasta, meatballs, sauce, bread, background music, and a kids' craft table.
 - *Event Rules:* Open to **Westminster residents only**, capped at the **first 100 RSVPs**. Residents must RSVP by **November 2** by emailing akirtland@westminster-ma.gov.
- **Little Art Gallery (2027 Exhibition Call for Artists):** Located in the main entry foyer of Town Hall, this gallery space was originally launched by the Cultural Council back in May 2018/2019. Exhibits change bi-monthly, creating a vibrant rotation of art that generates continuous buzz among visitors and staff alike. Applications are now open for the 2027 season for local artists (paintings, drawings, photography, mixed media, and 2D art). Exhibiting is completely free of charge. The priority

application deadline is **December 13** via the Cultural Council tab on the town website.

Master Community Calendar

Mark your calendars with these key town dates and deadlines:

1. **October 31:** Downtown Trick-or-Treat (5:00 PM – 7:00 PM) & VFW Field Bonfire
2. **November 2:**
 - Deadline to RSVP for First-Ever Community Spaghetti Supper
 - Deadline to submit advance questions for Mass DPH Health Evaluation Meeting
 - Official posting date of Special Town Meeting Warrant & postcard mailer dispatch
3. **November 3:** State Election Day (Polls open 7:00 AM – 8:00 PM at Senior Center)
4. **November 12:** First-Ever Community Spaghetti Supper (5:00 PM – 7:00 PM at Senior Center)
5. **November 16:** Mass DPH Health Data Evaluation Meeting (4:30 PM at Senior Center)
6. **November 17:** Special Town Meeting (6:30 PM at Westminster Elementary School)
7. **December 13:** Priority Application Deadline for Little Art Gallery 2027 Exhibition Season