



Preserving The Past

And embracing the future

In many ways, downtown Westminster in Maryland has changed little in the last 100 years. Located in Carroll County, the city's street-level shops and upper-floor apartments capture a glimpse of olden days. Local business owners greet passersby, and farming still dominates the landscape on the outskirts of town. Westminster is the quintessential "Main Street USA" community, complete with quaint tree-lined streets and stunning historic architecture on every corner.





A Look Back

The Westminster Branch Library is on East Main Street near the center of town, just up the hill from the railroad tracks, which travel past the building east to Baltimore. Library service in Carroll County has a colorful history. Service began in 1863, according to the Westminster Branch website, when the Rev. J. A. Monroe and Dr. Charles Billingslea founded the Westminster Public Library. It was relocated over the years, and in 1949, Mr. and Mrs. Walter H. Davis announced they would donate a public library building to Westminster and provide an endowment. The Westminster Public Library turned over operation and assets to the Davis Library, housed in a former Methodist church building, and dedicated in 1951. A county-wide system was established in 1958, with the Davis Library operating as the central branch. After a decade of lobbying for a modern library facility, the Westminster Branch

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Library opened in 1980. The current library branch is on the former site of the St. John Catholic Church, according to Lynn Wheeler, director of the Carroll County Public Library.

Defining The Space

The site's historic church rectory, which remains as office space for staff members, and the library building were set back from the street, creating a rectangular front yard. This area, approximately 1/3 of an acre, contained a series of walkways surrounded by mature landscaping past its prime. The nearly 30-year-old plantings were overgrown and created a dark,

heavily shaded environment. It became apparent that the grounds were no longer meeting the needs of library patrons, nor the city's residents and visitors, who frequently attended events and festivals along Main Street, and activities hosted by Carroll County Public Library (CCPL). Officials thought the grounds could be redeveloped not only to meet the needs of the library and its programs, but also to serve the growing demand for open space in the downtown area. The library declared its intent to create a more useable open space that could also function as a much-needed town green. In a series of input sessions, library staff,

city and county officials, business owners, residents, law enforcement, and many others participated, voicing their opinions and desires for the new space. The concept of a city green remained the focus.

Conversations And Discussions

At the conclusion of the sessions, it was decided that the new site needed to relate to its surroundings and reflect the historic character of Westminster. Attendees also decided that it should complement Locust Lane, a small, metropolitan plaza and pedestrian corridor that hosts concerts and houses the city Christmas tree every year.



There would also be an artist's garden with room for demonstrations, art shows and sales, and civic exhibits.

The new site would provide a diversity of scale. It had to accommodate large events with multiple vendors and performances, yet still provide smaller, personal space for reflection, reading, and lunching. The park also needed to supply comfortable passage for library patrons strolling through. Visitors needed to be able to traverse the park without feeling as though they had entered the personal space of those gathered. Finally, the new site needed to make its users feel secure with clear views

into and throughout the space. Dark corners and tight, shadowy spaces were eliminated.

Constructing The Space

The park entranceway was dramatically widened by partial removal of an existing low brick wall. In turn, visitors were greeted by a much larger, more public-scale

entrance. This ingress drew a linear connection with Locust Lane plaza across the street. A brick crosswalk strengthened the visual axis and claimed the area as pedestrian space. The remaining low wall was cleaned and repointed to match the weathered mortar of the library, and a period wrought-iron fence was added to the top. The library commissioned local



artist Bart Walter to create a sculpture to serve as the focal point of the park entrance. Today, this sculpture, *Wild Imaginings*, is observable to passersby and serves as the visual terminus from the far end of Locust Lane to the east.

Throughout the park, selective removal of overgrown landscaping made way for clear understory views. The mature linden and maple trees were limbed up, creating a high canopy for light. The result is an increased feeling of airy openness throughout. A vast, sweeping lawn is accented by wide, curved walks that mingle with planted beds at the park borders and

provide universal accessibility. Iron benches dot the landscape and create a series of more personal-scale spaces set back from the larger public lawn. Period iron lampposts reflect the historic standard of Main Street.

A sizeable, curvilinear deck flanks the library's main entrance to the north and serves as a performance stage for children's activities, lectures, concerts, and dance performances. The lawn flows into the space, providing informal seating for spectators. Between the stage and library structure, copious landscaping creates a natural backdrop for performances. Plant selections were made to consider eastern exposure and

shade tolerance. Azaleas and oakleaf hydrangea are accented by hostas, coral bells, and sweet woodruff. Mid-story, river birch and serviceberry maintain loose texture and allow for uninhibited views within the park.

Past And Present

While considered somewhat small, the Mary Lou Dewey Sculpture Park, named in honor of the late Mary Lou Dewey, an advocate for libraries who assisted in the founding of the Carroll County library system, serves a variety of functions large and small, formal and informal. The park plays host to hundreds of visitors attending events



throughout the year, and still ensures a quiet, urban oasis for daily users. The park continues to meet the needs of the contemporary community, while simultaneously preserving the historic nature of downtown Westminster and providing a city green on Main Street USA. **PRB**

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