

# Westminster Discernment Timeline

## 2014–2018: Early Signs of Transition

- \* Membership and financial decline become increasingly apparent.
- \* Westminster experiments with creative worship and education models.
- \* Traditional Sunday School shifts to an intergenerational “one-room schoolhouse” approach.
- \* LIFT (Living in Faith Together) launches as a monthly intergenerational worship/education experience and becomes highly successful.
- \* Key Action: Session combines two worship services into one to build congregational unity and energy.

## 2017–2019: Consulting & Organizational Restructuring

- \* **Significant staff transitions:**
  - \* Loss of associate pastor
  - \* Loss of music staff
  - \* Ongoing financial concerns
- \* **Westminster engages Vandersall Collective to help assess future direction.**
- \* Congregation completes the Congregational Assessment Tool (CAT).
- \* Major consultant recommendations:
  - \* Reimagine worship/music ministry
  - \* Flatten organizational hierarchy
  - \* Treat all church work as ministry
  - \* Do not refill associate pastor position
- \* Congregation responds with mixed feelings: hopefulness but also discouragement due to lack of a concrete implementation plan.
- \* **Key Action (2019):**
  - \* Committee structure reorganized into six ministry teams:
    - \* Sustain
    - \* Worship
    - \* Serve
    - \* Care
    - \* Flourish
    - \* Engage
- \* **GHIAA: Westminster co-founds Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA), increasing justice and advocacy engagement.**

## 2020–2022: Pandemic, Exhaustion & Clarifying Identity

- \* **Leadership identifies three core ministry values:**
  - \* Building Community
  - \* Deepening Faith
  - \* Pursuing Justice
- \* **COVID-19 forces shutdown of in-person ministry.**
- \* Westminster rapidly pivots to online worship.
- \* Westminster and First Presbyterian Church of Hartford begin collaborative worship leadership.
- \* LIFT adapts into online/at-home format.
- \* Parking lot gatherings maintain community connection.
- \* Despite challenges:
  - \* Giving remains relatively steady
  - \* Staff and volunteers provide extensive pastoral care
- \* **Key Event: Rev. Julie Emery takes medical leave due to exhaustion/burnout impacts.**
- \* **Leadership spends Spring 2022 clarifying staff, elder, and pastoral roles.**
- \* **Key Action (Summer 2022):**
  - \* Session pauses many meetings for a season of discernment, prayer, and worship.
  - \* Session studies *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You Are Going* by Susan Beaumont.

## Fall 2022: Congregational Listening & Values Alignment

- \* **Leadership holds congregational listening sessions.**
- \* Four dominant priorities emerge:
  - \* Charity/Social Justice
  - \* Connection/Relationships
  - \* Worship
  - \* Faith Formation
- \* Major themes identified:
  - \* Westminster is welcoming and inclusive.
  - \* Justice and service ministries are highly valued.
  - \* Congregation recognizes need to adapt to being a smaller church.

## 2023–2024: Community Hub Vision & Property Discernment

- \* **Session retreat develops a new “Proximate Purpose”**
  - \* Westminster as a community hub
  - \* Focus areas:
    - \* Mental health
    - \* Food insecurity

- \* Affordable housing
- \* **Key Action: Mental Health Hub Team formed.**
- \* Westminster receives grant support from Presbyterian Church (USA) for mental health ministry work.
- \* Mental Health Hub gains support but struggles to integrate fully into congregational life or address financial sustainability.

## 2024 Financial & Property Discernment

- \* Continued budget shortfalls drives Session to investigate diverse income sources:
- \* **Key Action: Session creates five investigative teams to explore:**
  1. Property development/sale
  2. Ministry partnerships
  3. Grant funding
  4. Kitchen development
  5. Long-term tenants
- \* **Presbytery of Southern New England funds a new consulting process.**
  - \* Vandersall and Flourish In Place conduct research and community interviews.
- \* **Summer worship collaboration with First Presbyterian Church of Hartford begins.**
- \* **Consultant Recommendations (Oct. 2024):**
  - \* Pursue an anchor tenant and/or housing development
  - \* Commit to at least one year of discernment

## 2025: From Visioning to Concrete Exploration

- \* **Session narrows focus to:**
  - \* Housing development exploration
  - \* Anchor tenant search
- \* **Session responds to financial concerns with key cost-cutting actions:**
  - \* Building closed during July
  - \* Christian education hours reduced
  - \* Staff furloughs implemented
- \* Morale declines among staff and leadership.

## Fall 2025 Developments

- \* **Westminster begins discussions with YMCA about hosting summer camp.**
- \* Rental Team negotiates for Summer 2026 use.
- \* **Housing Team secures a \$25,000 grant from Housing Ministries of New England.**
- \* Key Action: Westminster hires, to guide development discernment:

- \* Liz Torres of Housing Smarts, Real Estate Development consultant with expertise in Affordable Housing and non-profit work.

- \* Kathy Dorgan, architect

**\* In Budgeting for 2026, Session chooses to:**

- \* Keep building open during summer

- \* Avoid additional furloughs

- \* Create part-time rental coordinator position to increase rental income

## 2026: Active Discernment & Development Planning

**\*Winter 2026: Westminster applies for zoning permit to host YMCA summer camp.**

\* Required actions include:

- \* Neighbor notification

- \* Community information meeting

- \* Public hearing with Town of West Hartford

**\*January–February 2026: Housing consultants conduct:**

- \* Building/community tours

- \* Listening sessions with:

- \* Session

- \* Staff

- \* Housing Team

- \* Rental Team

- \* **Key Action: Pam Torsiello appointed liaison to Liz/Kathy**

- \* **Searches begin for:**

- \* Rental coordinator

- \* Facilities manager

**\* March 2026: Congregational feedback gathering held regarding:**

- \* Property use

- \* Housing possibilities

- \* Ministry priorities

**\* April–May 2026: Consultants present initial housing development concepts to Session.**

\* Ongoing meetings held with:

- \* Town officials

- \* Developers

- \* Real estate advisors

- \* Rental advisors

\* **Session continues discernment regarding future development possibilities.**