The meeting was called to order at 7:02 PM by chairman Brian McCarthy. Present in addition to Brian were members Dustin Liukkone, Jamie MacFarland, John Sauter, and Anthony Richardson. Also present were Chuck Miller, the committee's liaison to the Town, and Pat Murphy, Welfare Administrator for the Town of Merrimack. Member Curt Conrad was absent.

The committee had previously reviewed the proposal that Merrimack participate in the New Hampshire General Assistance Program (NH-GAP), an update to the MAPS program. The committee had asked several questions and raised some concerns. Chuck and Pat provided responses to the Committee members prior to the meeting, and they were present at this meeting to advance the discussion.

Chuck told us that the principal programmer for GAP had been a developer of the MuniSmart Software Suite, a well-respected software package used by municipalities in New Hampshire. However, this same programmer had also written a program for the Merrimack Town Clerk which had to be abandoned because it was not Y2K compatible, and we could not fix it because we did not have the source code.

In 2007 the Town of Merrimack purchased the MAPS software for the Welfare office from the City of Keene for $25. That purchase did not include source code, and the source for MAPS is not in the possession of the Town of Merrimack. Other New Hampshire municipalities are also using MAPS. The New Hampshire Local Welfare Administrator Association (NHLWAA) approached Seacoast Computer and asked them to provide support for MAPS. They declined, but offered to develop a new application to replace it. The new application, NH-GAP, provides improved workflow compared to MAPS, and also centralizes the database. Centralizing the database allows the software to alert a Town's welfare office to the need to contact another town to be sure a person isn't trying to collect welfare from two towns at the same time. However, centralizing the database also raises the concerns about security and confidentiality that the Committee articulated previously. Also, Pat told us that the problem of people getting assistance from two towns at the same time was not a high priority for her. She is already able to pick up clues to possible problems of this sort from the financial information that an applicant is obliged to provide to the town.

Having a central database would provide the ability to produce state-wide reports on welfare much more easily than is currently the case, where over 200 municipalities must be individually polled. State legislators have sometimes asked for this information to guide them when making laws, but the State has not mandated the use of a centralized database.

The improved workflow, mentioned above, consists of better reports, prompting for questions to ask of applicants, and prompting for follow-up contacts. Pat stated that these improvements are not of great value to her, because of her experience, but would be valuable to someone who was substituting for her, and to her successor.

The NHLWAA has contracted with Seacoast to develop NH-GAP for $20,000, of which $5,000 has been paid. Pat will send us the contract. Seacoast has three programmers involved with the project, one of whom works full-time on it.

The NH_GAP project contemplates conversion of MAP data to the NH-GAP format when it is stored in the centralized database. Some municipalities use the Welfare module of MuniSmart—they will also be converted to NH-GAP.

Pat told use that her department provides services for 50 to 60 households a year. We thought the $1500 per year proposed hosting cost of NH-GAP was very high considering that low volume, but Pat clarified that she sees many people to whom she provides references and other support that does not involve direct payments from the Town, and that each household that she services requires several interactions with the database. The number of interactions per household is highly variable, depending on the nature and extent of the service.

The Committee had expressed concerns about the terms of the contract, particularly the disclaimer of warranty and liability. Pat said she was also concerned, as were the cities of Nashua and Manchester. These concerns were raised only recently because a municipality must sign a letter of intent to see the proposed contract. In addition, Seacoast appears to view the contract as a standard document; they expressed no interest in negotiating different terms with over 200 municipalities on an individual basis. Nineteen municipalities have already signed the contract. We suggested that Pat should talk to the Town attorney about the contract. Perhaps the concerns of Pat, the Technology Committee, the City of Nashua and the City of Manchester can be brought to the NHLWAA and presented to Seacoast.

The concern was expressed that the encryption of data being exchanged between the Town's computers and the centralized database over the Internet should be better than 128-blowfish, because of the personal information about welfare applicants. Also, the use of "proprietary protocols" caused concern, since proprietary security systems which cannot be examined often turn out to have had flaws. We suggested that the source code for the part of NH-GAP that runs on the Town's computers should be made available to the Town. This will allow us to examine it for flaws, and fix it if the Town upgrades its operating system software and finds that the provided software only works with the old operating system. Pat told us that the contract between NHLWAA and Seacoast contains a source code escrow clause.

We also suggested that the local software should support Linux. This would allow the Town to save money by not having to purchase Microsoft Windows for the computer that runs it.

There were no comments from the press or public, though we did learn that one member of the public in attendance was present to observe the operation of the committee as a class assignment.

Jamie moved and Anthony seconded the motion to adjourn. The motion passed 5-0-0. Brian adjourned the meeting at 8:02 PM.

      Respectfully submitted,

           John Sauter, secretary, technology committee