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# Town of Merrimack



## Long Range Planning Session Summary Report

June 15, 2012



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## Introduction

The intent of the June 15, 2012 session with the Town Council and Senior Administrative staff was to review the progress the Town of Merrimack made over the year on any of the outstanding goals, and to look forward to 2012-2013. Primex<sup>3</sup> was pleased to be a part of this process to assist the Town in this important endeavor.

The report is not intended to be a verbatim account of the discussion, but rather to capture these major points and concepts.

## Participants

Tom Mahon, Chairman  
Finlay Rothhaus, Vice Chair  
Jackie Flood, Councilor  
Dan Dwyer, Councilor  
Tom Koenig, Councilor  
Nancy Harrington, Councilor  
Bill Boyd, Councilor  
Eileen Cabanel, Town Manager  
Paul Micali, Finance Director

The exercise was facilitated by:

Rick Alpers, Member Services Consultant, Primex<sup>3</sup>

## 2011 Goal Review Discussion

The session began with the group reviewing the goals for 2011 and to highlight two goals that the Town achieved by doing well and two goals that the Town could have done better, and to continue working on along with the goals identified for 2012-2013.

### Goals Done Well

The group discussed the following 2011 goals that the Town was successful with accomplishing.

- Community Development Office
  - A Director has been hired
  - There has been positive change in the office

- Wastewater Treatment
  - Plant upgrades are funded
- Economic Revitalization Zone (ERZ)
  - Six (6) properties are now classified
- SWOT Analysis from last years session
- Sensible budgeting process and setting aside funds in the capital reserves
- Economic Development
  - Worked with ZBA and Planning Board on various projects
  - Improvements to Route 3 and other developments
- Increased funding for infrastructure
  - Improvements to three (3) major roads
  - Budgeted well for improvements
- “Parked” PAYT
- Renegotiated tipping fees
- Council stayed stable with membership

### **Goals that the Town Could Have Done Better**

The group discussed the following 2011-2012 goals that the Town could have done better and could continue as part of 2012 goals.

- Vacant buildings being considered for ERZ
- Highway garage and redevelopment
  - Negative conclusion
  - Engineering study
- Data infrastructure inventory town wide
- Status of all town owned buildings
- Emphasis on Single Stream Recycling
  - Consideration of a swap shop similar to the Town of Bedford
- Communication
  - Improvements to the Town’s website
  - Internal between the Boards
    - Meeting reminders at least 48 hours prior via text message for all council meetings
- NH Plating Site
- Re-use of Landfill and alternative energy fields
- Handicap Accessibility for the Town Hall

Of the goals that the Town identified as needing to be continued for the 2012 goals, the following two were discussed in detail.

- Emphasis on Single Stream Recycling
  - Consideration of a swap shop similar to the Town of Bedford
    - Shifting ownership and management of swap shop to private enterprise

- Transfer station is under utilized
- Submit an RFQ
- End of calendar year for a deadline to complete study and implement an option
- Communication
  - Improvements to the Town's website
  - Internal communication between the Boards
    - Meeting reminders at least 48 hours prior via text message for all meetings

## 2012 Goals and Beyond

### Goal #1: Infrastructure

The group discussed the following areas around the Town's infrastructure and current projects that are in place.

#### Bridges

Currently, there are four (4) bridge projects and there has been a lot of head way with the funding. The following areas have been identified:

- Chamberlain Bridge Sidewalk Repair
- McGaw Bridge
- Baboosic Brook Bridge
- Wire Road Intersection

#### Drainage

The Town is currently in Phase II and the current bond has been spent and is on the way to being paid off. In addition, the Town has completed their own internal master plan, and some of the areas that were identified have been completed or in the process of completion. The group did discuss adding a new bond to the 2013-2014 budget to address said projects above and others on the list. Also, the Town needs to discuss what is necessary and what is needed, and it was discussed to have a separate workshop with the DPW Director to develop which projects are important and if it is necessary to have a bond. Other areas that were identified is the sewage master plan, and this may need to be moved up on the list of priorities.

## Paving

The Town has made paving a priority and there is \$800,000 in the current budget for paving projects. There was also a discussion around establishing which roads are priorities. Also, there were questions raised about areas that are being paved, for example, connecting roads and developments when main arteries in town could use more attention. In addition, the Council would like DPW Director Seymour to explain the PCI paving rating system in its entirety.

## **Goal #2: Financial Concerns**

The group discussed similar concerns again this year. The Town continues to experience the following: downshifting of costs from the State, looking for new revenue streams and increasing current streams, the unreserved fund balance, the increasing cost of health insurance, RSA 79-E, RSA 72:62 and disposition of Town owned property. **Revenue Systems**

In an attempt to identify new revenue streams, the group discussed the following:

- Fees for Park and Recreation Programs
  - Summer Camp
    - Swimming Lessons
    - Tennis Lessons
    - Math Camp
- Vendor Fees
  - Currently there is not an ordinance
  - What services do we charge for?
    - Consistency in the fees to the different type of organizations/groups
      - Non-profit vs. profit organizations
- Marketing Improvements
  - What are ways to let the residents and visitors know what is happening
    - Website
      - For example, the Town of Bedford
    - Quarterly booklet

## **Unreserved Fund Balance**

The group discussed the current state of the fund balance and how the Town needs to continue to work on ratcheting up their balance. In particular, the Council is looking to replenish the unreserved fund balance to acceptable levels each year.

## **Health Insurance Impacts**

The group discussed health insurance and how the costs are continuing to increase. The Manager has hired a consultant to review the insurance plan(s) and to educate our employees about their plans and how to use them. In addition, the Town will be entering the COMPASS Program through the current carrier. The Town is also in negotiations with the unions, and there has been an informational meeting with representatives from each of the unions. This initial informational meeting went very well and it seems that all unions are willing to work together to make healthcare affordable for employees and the employer.

## **Disposition of 15 Bishop Street “Red House”**

There was discussion amongst the group regarding the “Red House” and what the Town wants to do with it. This building is located next to the court house, and the Town currently owns this property. There is a resident who is interested in the building and would like to purchase and remove the building from the land leaving the town with a vacant parcel.

The group decided that a notice will be posted throughout town allowing all residents an opportunity to purchase the house but not the land.

## **RSA 70-E, Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive**

A presentation will take place this August to Manager and Council stating recommendations for expanded use of this statute.

## **Green Exemptions**

- A committee will be established to study the various opportunities for the Town. (EDCAC)

## **Sewer Rates**

The group reviewed the comparison fees with other Towns and to see how they fair with others comparable in size and services.

Participants decided that the Town will issue a RFQ regarding the fee structuring and a decision will be made at a regular council meeting.

## Goal #4: Capital Projects

The group discussed the following locations are town owned and are in need of improvement.

- Highway Garage
- South Fire Station
- Wasserman Park
- Library
- Watson Park
- Athletic Fields
- Merrills Trail

A separate meeting will be scheduled to discuss with department heads that oversee the above projects/locations what will be a priority moving forward. This will also allow staff to share a plan with the public prior to town meeting. Other options are being discussed in regards to possibly moving departments around to other locations to ensure all town owned facilities are being utilized in an efficient manner. The group decided that moving forward monies should be deposited into the appropriate capital reserves on a yearly basis to help defray costs when the capital project is up for renovation or replacement.

### Highway Garage

The Town will be working with a consultant to review the current buildings at the highway department and provide an assessment. Once this assessment has been completed, options will be presented to Manager and Council in order to make a sound decision prior to town meeting. The consultant will consider the following options but not limited to:

Renovate current facility  
Replace current facility in current location  
Replace facility at a new location.

The cost of the assessment will be \$20,000.

### South Fire Station

The current design for the South Fire Station should be modified to allow for expansion in the future, and to not be the central station. The Central Station should remain where it currently resides.

### Athletic Fields



The current athletic fields are being and have been over used and are in need of repair/renovation. All options need to be considered as to where this belongs on the priority scale. In the mean time a capital reserve account should be established and begin funding each to ensure that when it is time to overhaul the fields, there is enough dollars to do so.

#### Wasserman Park

This park has great potential to be a great asset for Merrimack. A discussion needs to take place amongst the council and community as to what to exactly to with it. Repair and band aid what you have or renovate and expand to what it could be. The group decided that the councilors would visit the park to gather a greater insight as to what is needed. This past spring, the Manager and staff have done quite a bit work there to stabilize buildings and beautify the area as best they can with available funds.

#### Library

A decision was rendered for the Manager to reach out to the Library Trustees to schedule a meeting to discuss a few items.

### **Goal #5: Dept-By-Dept Continuing Process Improvement**

The group had discussion about how to connect the departments with each other, or streamlining and cross training. Other topics that were discussed included how to continue with the level of service and quality of life that we provide for the Town. The budget will begin to be about service instead of positions. The group discussed the possibility of contracting out specific services including snowplowing, transportation of trash, and lawn maintenance.

### **Goal #6: Commitment of Volunteers**

The group discussed the involvement of volunteers for the Town and the level of commitment. Participants decided that volunteers will attend trainings that will be beneficial to their board or committee that they are serving on. For example, to provide a training for the planning board. Another suggestion was to develop a guide or tutorial to the various boards and committees to have an understanding of what their role is, and to provide guidance. Overall, the group felt that providing training for volunteers is important.

### **Goal #7: Communication Issues**

A discussion ensued regarding the best way to get information out to the public, specifically town meeting season. A list of variations and mediums was discussed. Participants noted any specific agenda items being discussed during meetings should be projected on the wall behind the councilors for the public and TV audience to see.

In addition, the group also discussed the possibility of having joint meetings with the school board regarding the use of one of the school buildings for an EOC shelter and scheduling the upcoming voting days for polling locations.

Someone suggested that the Council should remember to thank the volunteers and local businesses for their contribution to the Town periodically.

## **SUMMARY AND CLOSING**

There are numerous recommendations throughout the report. These recommendations were derived from the groups discussions around each item listed. This report should be used as guide for the Council and administration to help prioritize long standing items that need to be addressed. This report will also give great guidance to the administration on how to implement some of these decisions.

I would recommend that if each councilor has a binder for each meeting night, then this report should be permanently placed into the binder for reference when some of the issues listed in the report come up for discussion. If no binder is provided, then each Councilor should make an attempt to have this report with them at all meetings in the event that you need for reference.

At some point, you may want to bring the group back together to better prioritize this list. If you read the list, it seems daunting for someone to tackle. With clear direction and prioritization, this list can be accomplished. I am happy to assist in the process if asked.

It was a pleasure to assist you in this important process. If I can help again in the future, please do not hesitate to call.

All the best!

Respectfully submitted,

Rick Alpers  
Member Services Consultant