

Working together is success.
— Henry Ford



Town of Merrimack
New Hampshire

May 16, 2014



Purpose and Intended Result of the Goal Setting Session

The intent of the May 16, 2014 session with the Town Council and Senior Administrative staff was to review the progress the Town of Merrimack made over the year on existing goals, and to look forward to goals for 2014 and 2015. Primex³ was pleased to be a part of this process to assist the Town in this important endeavor.

Participants

Dave Yakuboff, Chair

Finlay Rothhaus, Councilor

Tom Mahon, Councilor

Nancy Harrington, Councilor

Tom Koenig, Councilor

Bill Boyd, Councilor

Eileen Cabanel, Town Manager

Paul Micali, Finance Director

The exercise was facilitated by:

Rick Alpers, Member Services Consultant, Primex³

Notes were recorded by **Jennifer Claise**, Assistant to the CEO, Primex³

Recap and Discussion of 2013 Goals

The session began with the group reviewing progress on some of the goals from 2013:
Infrastructure:

- **Public Works Garage** – Bond for new garage failed; item to be discussed further during this session.
- **South Fire Station** – Money has been placed in the 2014-2015 budget for a needs/space assessment; item to be discussed further during this session.
- **Wasserman Park** – Town recently hired a new Parks & Recreation Director who will help plan the park's direction going forward; item to be discussed further during this session.
- **Town Hall Complex** – The Red House is going to be demolished soon, and the ambulance garage continues to be an item for further discussion during this session.
- **Roads and Bridges** – Various updates provided
- **Sewer Expansion** – Currently Sunset Dr. is in the 2014-2015 budget to expand the sewer. Designs are underway and the project will begin in the Summer/Fall of 2014. This project will deplete the Sewer Expansion CRF.

Current Goals - 2014 and Beyond

The Council's agenda for this session broke the areas for discussion into four main headers: Infrastructure; Communication; Quality of Life Issues; and Other. The items were addressed in that order.

Infrastructure

a. i. Public Works Garage – Voted Priority #1 by Group

The bond to build a new Public Works Garage failed – it needed 66 percent of the vote but received only 57 percent. However, the Council noted that the majority of voters did approve, so there is already some momentum behind the project. Councilors agreed to go forward with the same project again and explore the following ideas in order to build the necessary voter support:

- Survey* voters to better understand their thoughts on the new garage. If they didn't approve, why? (***Note:** Council agreed that any surveys done should combine all questions on any desired subjects, not just the PW garage.)
- Be more proactive about marketing the project and spreading information. Explore use of reader boards, door-to-door visits, meetings with local civic organizations, social media, etc.
- Explore ways to scale back the project, "sharpen the pencil" and bring down the total cost
- Revise the artistic rendering that was presented to voters – consensus that the original image gave residents an unrealistic idea of the scope of the project
- Seek assistance/advice from existing contacts (one is at Harvey Construction; one is a local PR/consultant with experience on other local projects)

ii. Next Generation of Vehicles

The group received a list of all Town-owned vehicles. Many of the newer cars are computerized, and standard maintenance has become more challenging – everything is code-based and requires specialized equipment to read the codes. Additionally, there is concern that routine practices are not keeping up with these changes (e.g. using regular oil in synthetic oil cars). Council reached consensus to look into working with other communities on the purchase of necessary mobile equipment, or possibly outsourcing the maintenance. The Council would also like to collect data on the DPW activities and assigned tasks for clarity and to identify potential areas for process improvement.

b. Fire Department Study for Future Needs – Voted Priority #2 by Group

The "South Fire Station" topic was expanded to include a more complete look at the current and future fire and other public safety needs of the community, and how these needs relate to any building/facility needs. Data has been collected on FD calls: type of call, location, etc., and the Council wants to hire a consultant to analyze this data and present a high-level overview of Merrimack's current and future Fire/EMS needs. Other possibilities discussed for the future included the following:

- Expand current services to offer walk-in type care (blood-pressure checks, wound dressing changes, etc.)
- Consolidate Police and Fire Departments – "Merrimack First Response" or "Merrimack Public Safety"

- Require new firefighters to also be trained as EMTs to address community's evolving needs
- The group noted the importance of being transparent with the Fire Department and with all affected stakeholders as this study is conducted.

c. Parks

i. Wasserman Park – Voted Priority #3 by Group

The future of, and vision for, Wasserman Park continues to be an area of focus for the Town Council. The new Parks & Recreation director has provided a report with suggestions for the park's future, but Council needs to provide direction as to what should be done with the park's buildings, many of which are in disrepair. The Finance Director gave the Council an update on the status of various buildings and the maintenance they currently require. He estimated that total repairs for the entire camp (not including electrical upgrades) would total approximately \$20,000. Priority repairs for the Summer of 2014 were identified as the following:

- Paint cabins
- Repair roof of summer day camp office
- Find and patch leak in roof of Arts and Crafts building
- Paint MYA Soccer storage building

Total cost: \$6,000 – currently in budget

The group reached consensus to propose a recreation revolving fund (authority under RSA 35-B:2 Tax and Appropriations) to cover maintenance and repairs needed for the park. This would be a ballot item. Other Comments Regarding Wasserman Park:

- Lions Club would like to adopt one of the buildings for repair – explore the idea of challenging other civic organizations to do the same
- Council would like P&R Director and Committee to review and conceptualize expanded road access in the park, and then bring a plan to Council
- Council would like P&R Director to evaluate storage space in basement of park's function hall
- Suggestion to change the sign at Wasserman Park (and all Town parks) to include new logo

ii. Watson Park

There has been discussion of bringing an ice skating rink to this park, and the group is supportive of this idea – it would bring strong visual appeal to the area. There is some concern about bringing electricity to the park in a way that will not be an eye sore; the group agreed that they do not want a pole in front of the park or near an entrance, but it could be placed in a back corner of the park. (Solar power is also an option to be explored.) The group noted the need to be mindful of the park's neighbors and any impacts to them before implementing any changes.

d. **Town Hall Complex – Ambulance Garage – Voted Priority #4 by Group**

The Ambulance Garage is currently being used as storage space for various Town departments. The options for this garage are either to undergo extensive repairs (new roof, new doors, new windows, and new garage doors) or tear down the facility. The group agreed not to repair the garage at this point – recommended tear down and purchase of shed for storage. This will be an item for next year’s budget. The group noted that there may be some citizens who are concerned about tearing down this facility, and they agreed that the historic marker inside should be preserved.

e. **Roads and Bridges – Continental Boulevard**

The State has the authority to declare this road no longer a state highway, at which point the Town would have no recourse and may need to close the road. Closing the road would have widespread impacts throughout Town. Councilors suggested finding out whether the State would at least assist with reconditioning of the road; right now it is on an as-is basis. The group discussed the potential of holding a public hearing to discuss the dilemma and how the Town should handle it – phrase it as “possible road closure.”

f. **Sewer Expansion**

The group discussed whether sewer expansion is a current priority for the Council. The consensus was that it is on the Council’s radar, but is not an urgent need. The Town Manager informed the group that this no longer needs to be funded through the general fund; it can be funded through the WWTF going forward.

School Sewer Line – A development wants to go in near the middle school. The Town never accepted the sewer line there as it is not built to specifications or in the right-of-way. There is uncertainty here – it may require discussion between the Council and the SAU.

Sewer Access Fees – The current access fee for some land parcels (hotels, restaurants) is \$500,000, and there is fear that this negatively affects the marketability of the land. The Council is set to see a new proposal in May that involves a tiered fee system and the fees are greatly reduced.

g. **Library**

Brief discussion only – other priorities take precedence right now.

h. **Infrastructure Other**

Depot Street Pump Station – This station is located on Town property, but the only way to access it is through private property. The private property owner is requesting that it either be repaired or removed. The group decided to invest a small amount of money (under \$500) to secure the pump station until a decision is made on how to proceed. Long-term repairs would include a new roof, which would cost between \$4,000 and \$6,000 to replace. The group also agreed to seek input from the Town’s Heritage Commission as they may want to preserve the pump station for historic purposes.

Storm Water Permit – MS-4 – Merrimack joined with other communities to hire attorney to challenge the EPA, and the EPA has not yet responded. This item is currently in limbo.

Communication

a. Survey Monkey

The group discussed the idea of using both electronic and paper surveys to solicit public feedback on a variety of issues, and agreed to reach out to an expert over the summer to assist with developing good questions.

b. Increasing Voter Turnout

In an effort to encourage more residents to vote, the group is in favor of using increased promotional signage prior to Town elections, and to using this signage both inside and outside of the center of Town. There was agreement to look into renting signs and asking local businesses to use their signage as well.

Quality of Life Issues

a. Tennis Court Issue

Tennis courts are currently being evaluated by the State, with a decision to come sometime in June (the courts are expected to fail inspection). The Council agreed to remove asphalt if requested to do so by the school board, but not to do anything else at this time. If the State requires additional work, the Council will address it then.

b. Sidewalk discussion

i. Sidewalk master plan? Other communities have a “sidewalk fund” and a sidewalk master plan that designates priorities. In order to put this in place, the planning board will need to be on board and will also need funds to develop a master plan. There was some discussion as to which areas of town need sidewalks, and which do not (there was not complete agreement in this area).

ii. Church Street closing? There was group consensus that Church Street is dangerous and should be closed, but that this discussion should wait until Wire Rd. Intersection discussion, which will be reviewed again in a few years.

c. Explore a Boat Launch Off of Griffin Street

There is an area off Griffin Street that may be a logical spot to put in a boat ramp for access to the Merrimack River. The Town owns this property now, and the group agreed it needs more attention and occasional police patrol as it has been neglected for a while. The group agreed the Parks and Recreation Director could be tasked with having the State review whether a boat launch can be located there.

d. Rev. Wright Property

General update only – no action at this time, but this item will eventually require input/guidance from the Council.

e. Parking on Amherst Road

The group discussed the need for additional parking on this road to accommodate sporting events on nearby fields. The group agreed that the Parks and Recreation Director should work with the Public Works Department to develop options for increasing parking in this area, and then present the options to the Council.

Other

- a. **Explore using the Wright Avenue property (plating site) and the landfill to generate revenues via solar**

Councilor Boyd told the group that there is grant money available for municipalities to develop solar farms on economically disadvantaged property. This would theoretically generate enough electricity to power some Town buildings, and/or “sell back” some of the electricity to the power company. There are several challenges with logistics (transmitting electricity and line loss), but there was some interest in the group about exploring this idea. Councilor Boyd agreed to gather additional information and bring it back for the Council’s review.

- b. **Discussion Question: Are we adequately staffed for the future?**

The Town Manager told the group that she is currently brainstorming regarding succession planning in several key roles throughout Town. The larger discussion surrounded the need for analysis of how Merrimack is growing, and what the Town will need to do in order to accommodate that growth. There is also a need to determine whether the current skill-set is proportionally adequate (Police, Fire, EMT, DPW, WWTF, etc.) for the community’s needs, both now and in the future. The group agreed that this item should remain on the radar.

Additionally, there was consensus that the Town should develop a comprehensive, cross-departmental crisis-management response plan in case of a larger-scale crisis or emergency (the recent Brentwood officer shooting was used as an example). Members of the group said that a smaller Town group has been effective in dealing with smaller-scale incidents, but that a larger plan is a significant need.

Summary and Closing

There are numerous self-generated next steps and recommendations throughout the report. These recommendations were derived from the group’s 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 guidance to the administration on how to implement some of these decisions.

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

All the best!

Respectfully submitted,

Rick Alpers
Member Services Consultant

Center for
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A d v a n c e m e n t



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