CITY OF MERRILL
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION
Thursday, March 27, 2014 at 5:30 P.M.
City Hall Common Council Chambers
1004 East First Street

AGENDA

1. Call to order
2. Strategic long-term planning session/discussion #3, facilitated by Art Lersch
3. Public Comment
4. Adjournment

NOTE: It is possible that a quorum of the Common Council will be present at this meeting. However, no Common Council action will be taken.

Agenda prepared by City Clerk Bill Heideman
Agenda reviewed by Mayor Bill Bialecki

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Date and time agenda was posted: _____ *Posted by:* _____

MERRILL Wisconsin
LOCATION NATURE PEOPLE

UW Extension
University of Wisconsin-Extension

City of Merrill Strategic Planning Session #3 Outline

Thursday, March 27, 2014
5:30-7:30
City of Merrill Council Chambers

I. Any Additions or Changes to the Session #2 Report?

II. Discussion: Overview of Services Provided by City Government

a. Department head report status

III. Update: Public Involvement in the Process

IV. Continue SOAR Analysis

a. Strengths (Any additions?)
b. Opportunities (that the city can take advantage of from outside sources)
c. Aspirations (using the vision statement as a reference)
d. Results (What should be the outcomes and impacts of city government work?)
e. + Evaluation; How should those results be measured?

V. Begin City Government Mission Statement Development

*A **mission statement** is generally one or two sentences. It usually conveys the most critical purpose of the organization in the **present**. It answers the question "why does the organization exist?" Mission statements, although succinct, are not slogans. Normally a good mission statement mentions who the organization seeks to serve, the primary goal it wishes to reach, and the geographical area in which it is working.*

a. Review core values
b. Discussion: What is city government's current, primary purpose?
c. What non-city residents does city government serve?
d. What currently makes this particular city government unique?

VI. Discussion: How Strategic Planning can assist other City Government Processes

VII. Parking Lot Issues

VIII. Next Meetings (reminders & schedule additional sessions)

City of Merrill, Wisconsin

Strategic Planning Report

Session #2
Meeting facilitated and report developed by
Art Lersch, University of Wisconsin-Extension, Lincoln County
March 6, 2014

Introduction

Twenty-six City of Merrill stakeholders including interested citizens, the mayor, council members, the city administrator, and department heads attended the second city government strategic planning session. The session was facilitated by Art Lersch, UW-Extension, Lincoln County. During the meeting, the group finalized both city government and community vision statements, something that to the knowledge of those present had never been done before. Although both statements will not please everyone, they will do much to help frame future strategic planning discussions. The statements are:

> ***"Merrill, embracing our diverse heritage while working toward a brighter future"*** (Community)

> ***"We, the employees and officials of the City of Merrill, envision superior services while being open, responsible, and transparent to the public"*** (City Government)

Details of how these statements were developed can be found below under the "Vision Development for City Government and Community" section.

Any Additions or Changes to the Session #1 Report?

No additions or changes were requested.

Discussion: Overview of Services Provided by City Government

To begin the conversation, the facilitator asked:

a. How familiar are you with all the services provided?
b. If you need an overview, how would you like to receive it?

City officials expressed that there is ample opportunity for them to learn about services provided. City Administrator Dave Johnson mentioned that he has asked department heads to develop summary sheets explaining services offered. It was agreed that this would be enough information to supplement what is already known. He requested that department heads complete their summaries in advance of the next strategic planning meeting. A review and discussion of those documents will be placed on that meeting's agenda.

Discussion: Public Involvement in the Process

The facilitator handed out two public comments received via email. Those in attendance suggested that he continue soliciting public input through articles in the Foto News. It was also recommended that a form be placed in the Foto News asking for public comment. The form would be more visible than a request embedded in an article. Public input, it was suggested, can also be solicited via the Extension Facebook page. Lastly, the facilitator requested that those taking part in the planning process communicate to their acquaintances that they should feel free to submit their comments directly to him (Arthur.Iersch@ces.uwex.edu).

Vision Development for City Government and Community

The large group was split into two smaller work units. Considering the information discussed and compiled during the first planning session, one work unit developed a draft vision statement for city government and the other for the community. The community statement was developed from the perspective of city government leaders and staff. Changes to both statements were made within the large group setting.

During both processes, several statements were developed and consensus was reached within each work unit as to which one to endorse. People serving in each work unit commented that the very interactive process led to a wide array of possible items to emphasize.

Suggested concepts to place in the community vision statement included:

- Family friendly
- Safe
- Family atmosphere
- Gateway to Northwoods

- Great place to work and play
- Business friendly environment
- Location, Nature, People
- Taking pride and honoring family values

The initial draft of the statement that was seriously considered was "Merrill, City of Parks, a vibrant progressive community embracing our diverse heritage while working toward an even brighter future."

Work unit members felt that the statement should be shorter so it could more easily be remembered. After intense discussion, the work unit developed the following:

- ***"Merrill, embracing our diverse heritage while working toward a brighter future"***

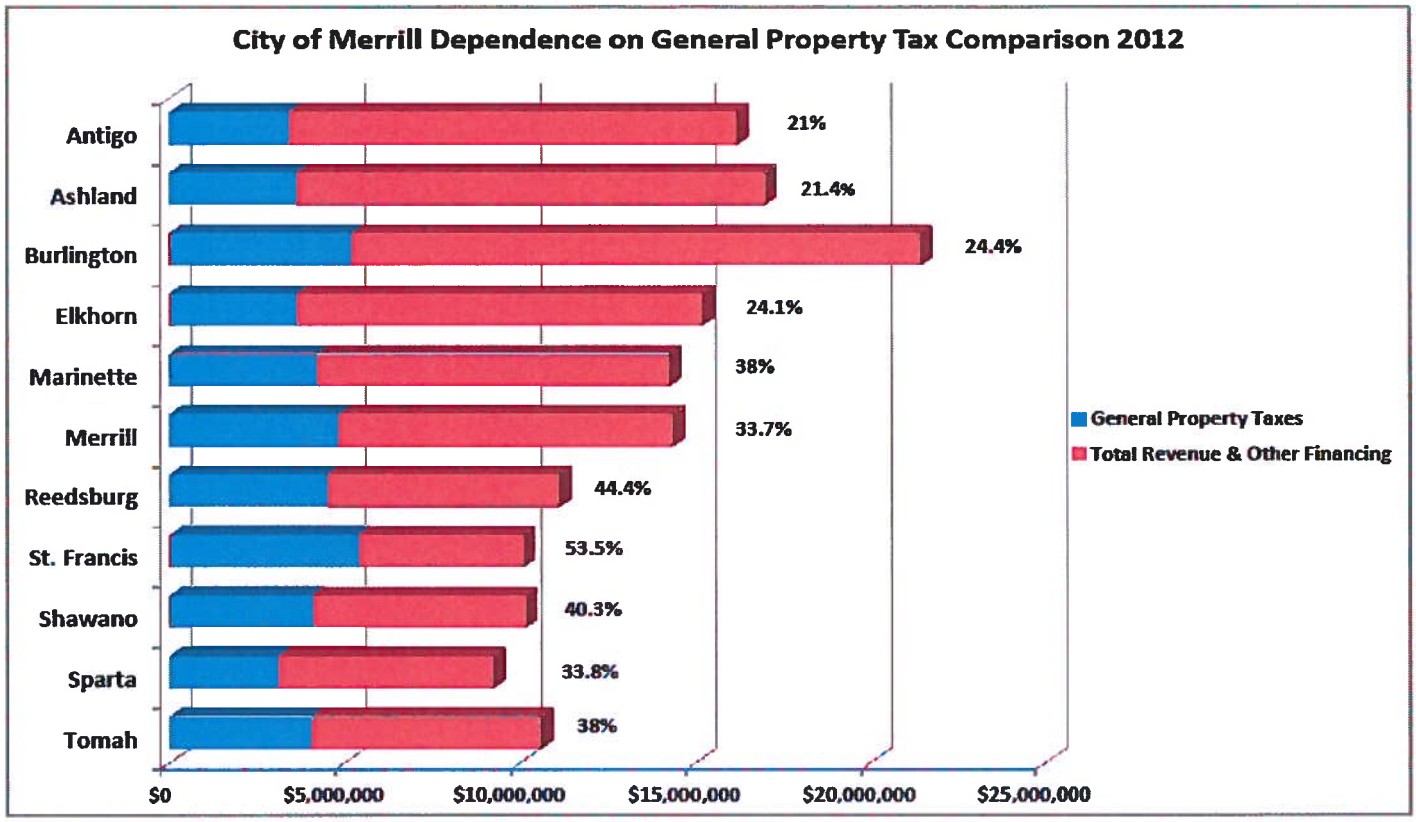
Going through a similar process with several iterations being developed, the city government work unit created the following:

- ***"We, the employees and officials of the City of Merrill, envision superior services while being open, responsible, and transparent to the public"***

The city administrator plans to insert both statements in a resolution or resolutions so that they can formally be reviewed and voted on during regular Council or Committee of the Whole meetings. Once passed, it is recommended that the statements be posted in various places throughout city buildings, on the city website, and be communicated well to the general public on a consistent basis. It is also recommended that the statements be periodically reviewed and if needed modified to reflect changes made to city government or in the community.

Parking Lot Items (additional feedback)

The facilitator presented a bar chart showing the degree of dependence on general property taxes Merrill and other similar cities had in 2012. At that time, Merrill's percentage of property taxes in relation to total revenues was 33.7%, just shy of the average for all the other cities combined. It was stated that this situation may have changed since 2012. Data for 2013 was not yet available when the chart was created. The chart is included on the next page.



No additional parking lost items were brought forth.

Begin SOAR Analysis

The facilitator reminded the group that SOAR stands for strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results. "Strengths" are those internal factors that help make Merrill city government function well. "Opportunities" are external factors that can possibly be utilized to help the city better manage how it provides services. "Aspirations" are more detailed articulations of how those within city government want city operations to be like several years down the road. "Aspirations" build off of vision statements. And "results" are the expected outcomes or impacts of city government's work.

The group began by analyzing city government strengths.

Strengths:

- Safety services.
    - Both the fire and police departments are career rather than volunteer operations
    - Both the police and fire department are administered by very competent, strong leaders
    - Both the police and fire department staff take a highly professional approach to their work
    - The police and fire departments work well together to achieve common goals

- The city workforce is committed/dedicated to public service and is highly competent. (An example would be city employees having to do utility work during Merrill's coldest winter on record). Many of them have the attitude that they are filling career positions.

- All city departments have a community focus. Their employees are constantly thinking of ways to strengthen the community through the services they provide.

- City officials and employees are proud of Merrill and passionately wish to improve it.

- The city currently has good, strong, progressive leadership.

- The number and diversity of services the city provides is extensive. (E.g. Services are provided to citizens of various ages.)

- City government has extensive interaction with the Merrill Area Public School District, especially the fire and police departments.

- Availability of MP3/Merrill Productions videotaping government in action to show how committees and Council function.

- There is a unique public transportation system for this size a city.

Next Meeting

The next planning meeting is scheduled to take place **Thursday, March 27, 5:30-7:30, City of Merrill Council Chambers**.