

City of Merrill, Wisconsin

Strategic Planning Report

Session #3

Meeting facilitated and report developed by
Art Lersch, University of Wisconsin-Extension, Lincoln County
March 27, 2014

Introduction

Twenty-two City of Merrill stakeholders including interested citizens, the mayor, council members, the city administrator, and department heads attended the third city government strategic planning session. The session was facilitated by Art Lersch, UW-Extension, Lincoln County. During the meeting, the group completed a city government SOAR analysis.

Any Additions or Changes to the Session #2 Report?

No additions or changes were requested.

Update; Public Involvement in the Process

The facilitator mentioned that he will be submitting an article to the Foto News and if possible the Merrill Courier with a form asking people for their comments. He requested that the form be made available through the city website. He will continue to encourage citizens to send their comments via email and will arrange for comments to be provided through websites and social media.

Continue SOAR Analysis

No additions were made to the "strengths" list developed during session #2.

Opportunities:

- Become even more involved in regional efforts that will allow for the pooling of resources.

- Work more closely with more of the entities that promote regional efforts such as Centergy, Grow North, and North Central Regional Plan Commission.
- Increase the openness and transparency of city government by improving internal and external communications.
- Communicate by using a wider variety of means including social networking and other online options.
- Focus on just a few specific, potentially very impactful economic development projects (Lincoln House; Guys Shop, etc.). Create a marketing strategy to persuade developers, including those who live in the area, to take on the projects.
- Continue to explore multijurisdictional ways (intergovernmental cooperation) to provide services (e.g. city and county; both cities working together, etc.).
- Search and apply for state and federal grants to offset equipment and perhaps other costs.
- Hold meetings with other governments to learn about their “best practices” and apply those methods if/when it makes sense.
- Continue attending North Central Wisconsin fire and police chief meetings (learning more about regional issues).
- City IT department needs to provide training to Council members and residents on how to best use social media and other communication strategies.
- Develop or join multi-city/county cooperatives that purchase supplies. Cooperatives drive down prices because they buy in bulk. Take a similar approach to providing employee benefits (check out UW-Platteville arrangement.)

Aspirations:

Group members were asked to use the city government and community vision statements as references for the discussion.

- Focus of residential development in the central city area rather than in the outskirts of the city.
 - Continue blight elimination

- Develop whole areas rather than just isolated lots
 - Review and change when it makes sense zoning ordinances that impede residential re-development
- Aspire to be responsive to the changing needs of the community.
 - City government needs to have a user friendly attitude while stressing to residents that it can't do it all.
 - Aspire to educate people how city government works.
 - City government needs to be friendlier to businesses. Help business owners through the process of locating here or expanding. If a regulation cannot/should not be changed, give business owners other options that will help them do what they need to do.
 - More open and transparent communication should be fostered. There needs to be communication improvements between city departments. Information should be out sooner. (IT can help facilitate this). Department reports to oversight committees should be forwarded to alderpersons. Committee minutes should be completed and distributed in a more timely fashion. Make it easier for people to watch MP3 broadcasts (now only on cable; IT can help facilitate).
 - Aspire to be the best we can be; we should be developing and communicating best practices in government management.

Results (expected)

- City government should do all it can to recruit businesses to the area. It should be more strategic about what businesses are recruited. Specifically, there are opportunities to target insurance industry businesses because this is a regional hub for that service.
- City government should do all it can to squelch the area rumor mill.
- City government should have stronger ties to the local hospital and be more active in promoting the health of the community. The hospital is a vital institution in our community and losing it would be devastating.
- "Nurture" business growth. City government should do everything it can to promote the economic health of the community by working closely with businesses that wish to expand or relocate here. Be a facilitator rather than an entity that throws up road blocks to business expansion, retention, and relocation. (The city with the county

economic development director as the point person is currently finalizing details that will likely bring a business incubator to Merrill).

- City government should embrace technology (make information about city government and the community more available).
- City government should pass more ordinances that enhance residents' quality of life. A recent example would be the "chicken ordinance" allowing residents to raise chickens and have home grown, healthier eggs.
- City government should help foster a healthier community (e.g. support of River Bend Trail project).
- City government should take specific actions to attract new residents and increase the tax base.
- City government should take specific actions to help bring more family supporting jobs to Merrill. Many of these jobs can be realized by promoting industrial growth.
- City government should help foster a greener, more eco – friendly community.
- City government should utilize more highly sophisticated technology uses.
- City government should help find and implement ways to attract and retain young professionals.
- Each department needs to do a better job of communicating successes. This will help to develop pride in both the community and city government.
- City government helps solve regional problems. Solving regional problems will help strengthen the city.

Next Meetings

The next meeting is scheduled to take place **Thursday, April 17 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. in City Council Chambers**. The next meeting after that is scheduled for Wednesday, May 7 from 5:30-7:30 p.m., also in City Council Chambers.

City of Merrill Strategic Planning Session #4 Outline

Thursday, April 17, 2014

5:30-7:30

City of Merrill Council Chambers

I. Any Additions or Changes to the Session #3 Report?

II. Discussion: Overview of Services Provided by City Government

The expectation is that the information contained in these reports will help inform discussions during planning meetings.

- a. Are there any other reports that still need to be submitted?
- b. Are there any questions about the department head reports handed out at the last planning session?
- c. Are there any services outlined in the reports that you need more details about?
- d. What if anything else do you need to learn about how Merrill city government operates?

III. 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/entities does city government serve?
- d. What currently makes this particular city government unique?

Following the initial discussion, the large group will be divided into two work units. Each unit will create a draft mission statement for city government. The two drafts will be reviewed and consolidated in the large group setting.

IV. Begin Strategic Issue Identification

Based on SOAR and the discussions to date, what are the most critical internal and external issues facing Merrill city government currently and over the next five years?

V. Additional Parking Lot Items?

VI. Next Meetings (Wednesday, May 7); Schedule others