

**City of Merrill
Committee of the Whole
Thursday, June 19, 2014 at 5:30 P.M.
City Hall Common Council Chambers
1004 East First Street**

Committee of the Whole members present (8 of 9): Mayor Bill Bialecki, Alderman Chris Malm (First District), Alderman Peter Lokemoen (Second District), Alderwoman Kandy Peterson (Fourth District), Alderman John Burgener (Fifth District), Alderman Dave Sukow (Sixth District), Alderman Rob Norton (Seventh District) and Alderman Tim Meehean (Eighth District). Alderman Ryan Schwartzman (Third District) had an excused absence.

Other attendees included: City Administrator Dave Johnson, Transit Director Rich Grenfell, Utility Superintendent Kim Kriewald, Street Commissioner Richard Lupton, Police Chief Ken Neff, Fire Chief Dave Savone, Library Director Stacy Stevens, Finance Director Kathy Unertl, City Hall Maintenance Supervisor Ramona Vanderkam, Duane Pfister, Judy Woller, Gene Bebel, Garth Swanson (arr. 5:38), Lincoln County Community Development Educator Art Lersch and City Clerk Bill Heideman. A student was in attendance to videotape the meeting for the Cable Access Channel.

Call to order

Mayor Bialecki called the meeting to order at 5:32 P.M.

Public Comment

Mayor Bialecki announced that, due to the Fall Primary Election, the August Common Council meeting will be held on Wednesday, August 13th rather than Tuesday, August 12th.

Consider lifting hiring freeze to replace retiring employee @ water utility

This item was part of an amended agenda.

John Boucher, an employee at the water utility, has given notification that he intends to retire. City Administrator Johnson reported that need for a replacement is immediate, and therefore he is requesting that the hiring freeze be lifted in order to hire a replacement. This position is funded 100% by the water utility.

Alderman Sukow stated that he considers this request a budget-related item, and that, when the strategic planning sessions began, the Common Council was told that no budget-related decisions could be made until all strategic planning sessions were complete. Alderman Sukow feels that this request seems to contradict that directive. Alderman Norton agreed with Alderman Sukow.

Alderman Burgener spoke in favor of lifting the hiring freeze now, because the hiring process will take significant time.

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Motion (Lokemoen/Burgener) to lifting the hiring freeze to hire a water treatment plant operator to replace a retiring employee. Motion carried 4-3 on roll call vote. Voting No – Alderman Malm, Alderman Sukow and Alderman Norton.

Strategic long-term planning session/discussion #7 (facilitated by Art Lersch)

Mayor Bialecki turned the meeting over to Lincoln County Community Development Educator Lersch. The Session #6 Report was reviewed. There were no changes or corrections to the report.

City Administrator Johnson mentioned an e-mail that he had recently sent. The e-mail stressed that infrastructure needs to be an integral part of strategic planning, regardless of the specific issue under discussion.

Methods of prioritizing projects were then discussed. It was agreed that the top priority philosophy is that, if something is broke, it must be fixed.

Tax levy, borrowing and financing were then discussed.

The meeting attendees were then divided into four groups. Each group discussed one of the four issues that had previously been identified as critical issues in strategic planning. Those issues are tax base, services, budget philosophy and economic development (and redevelopment).

The leaders for each discussion group were assigned as follows:

Tax Base	Mayor Bialecki
Services	Alderman Burgener
Budget Philosophy	City Administrator Johnson
Economic Development & Redevelopment	Finance Director Unertl

At 7:06 P.M., the small groups reconvened as one group. Reviews of each of the four small-group discussions were then conducted. The following led the review discussions:

Tax Base	Library Director Stevens
Services	Police Chief Neff
Budget Philosophy	City Administrator Johnson
Economic Development & Redevelopment	Finance Director Unertl

Lincoln County Community Development Educator Lersch will compile a report on the entire strategic plan.

The last strategic planning meeting will be held on in the City Hall Common Council Chambers, on Thursday, July 17th, beginning at 5:30 P.M. At that meeting, the report on the entire strategic plan will be reviewed. Methods of evaluating the plan after it is implemented will also be discussed at that meeting.

Adjournment

Motion (Burgener/Peterson) to adjourn. Carried. Adjourned at 7:26 P.M.

Minutes prepared and submitted by:

William N. Heideman, CMC, WCMC
City Clerk