

## **Strategic Planning Report**

Session #4

Meeting facilitated and report developed by  
Art Lersch, University of Wisconsin-Extension, Lincoln County  
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### **Introduction**

Twenty-one City of Merrill stakeholders including interested citizens, the mayor, council members, the city administrator, and department heads attended the fourth city government strategic planning session. The session was facilitated by Art Lersch, UW-Extension, Lincoln County. During the meeting, the group completed a mission statement for city government and began identifying the most crucial strategic issues that city government will likely have to address in the next several years.

### **Any Additions or Changes to the Session #3 Report?**

No additions or changes were requested.

### **Discussion: Overview of Services Provided by City Government**

There were no further questions about the reports that were provided. The Merrill Area Community Enrichment Center distributed its outline of services. No additional reports are pending.

### **City Government Mission Statement Development**

After once again reviewing the city government core values that were identified during the first planning session, the group created a list of the current primary purposes of Merrill city government.

- Provide public services to residents and non-residents
- Good level of affordable services
- Promote quality of life

- Customer driven government; responsive to customer needs
- Provide information and education on city government to the public
- Uniformity (consistency in how city government acts and provides services)
- Doing the business of the city (managing policy)
- Carrying out the “nuts and bolts” of democracy
- Discovering and fulfilling the majority’s needs
- Be informed and share that information
- Continuously educate (there is no such thing as over communication; we need to be constantly communicating with one another and the public). Part of this constant communication should be more widespread advertisements of when and where city committee meetings are taking place. Attempt to provide more advance notice when/if feasible. (Note: The city clerk explained that more advanced notice is often not feasible depending on when the meetings are to be held and when agenda items are brought forth.)
- Brag about/promote the city
- Engaging the public

Following this exercise, the large group was split into two smaller work units. Using both the core values and “purpose” lists, each work unit developed draft mission statements. Those statements were:

*“Through innovative and dynamic leadership, the City of Merrill is committed to provide a high level of public services to enhance the quality of life in a consistent, open, and fiscally responsible manner.”*

*“Our mission is to consistently provide high quality services to the City of Merrill.”*

The work units were brought together to consolidate the draft statements. After several iterations, the group agreed on the following:

***“The mission of the City of Merrill government is to provide high quality services in an innovative, consistent, and efficient manner.”***

As will be the case with the two vision statements that were previously drafted, the mayor and city administrator indicated that the mission statement will also be presented in a formal resolution to the City Council and/or the Committee of the Whole for consideration.

### **Begin Strategic Issue Identification**

Group members were asked to think in terms of important, complex issues that city government will likely have to address in the coming years. More potential issues will be added to what is mentioned below during the May 7 meeting. Once the list is complete, each issue’s level of importance and urgency will be further examined before priorities are chosen.

- Rising costs of providing public services while the city’s tax base is declining or stagnate  
(blight issues contribute greatly to this issue)
  - Economic development, including the creation of such amenities like the River Bend Trail, and job creation are important elements in the attempt to strengthen the tax base
  - Increasing and maintaining the optimal city population is key to increasing the tax base
  
- Are there any services that we need to provide that we currently are not? Are there services that we may not be able to provide any longer or should not be offering?
  - If services are to be maintained at current levels or even increased, how will that be funded? (Note: It was mentioned that successful efforts to grow the city’s tax base and to maintain or increase the city’s population will be key components in helping city government pay for the services people need and want.)
  
- What is Merrill city government’s budget philosophy?
  
- How can Merrill city government help to better engage the public and organizations in projects that will enhance quality of life? Government can no longer do anything important without the help of organizational partners and citizens.

- How can city government facilitate partnerships with entities that are working to address regional issues? (i.e. with other governments, with nonprofit organizations, with private business, etc.)
  
- How can city government help foster a cultural change within Merrill where its citizens are more trusting of one another, their city government, and have more hope for and faith in the future?
  - Perhaps some of this can be done by promoting the positive things that are already happening in the city.

**Next Meeting**

The next city strategic planning meeting is scheduled to take place **Wednesday, May 7, 2014, from 5:30 – 7:30 p.m. in the City Council Chambers.**