

City of Merrill Fire Department



Strategic Plan

July 2010 – June 2013

Planning process & report developed by:

Art Lersch
Associate Professor
Community Resource Development Educator
University of Wisconsin – Extension, Lincoln County



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Executive Summary

This strategic planning project, the first for the City of Merrill Fire Department, was necessitated by the fact that the department, like most other city departments, is increasingly having to look for non-tax levy supported ways to provide its services or to, at the very least, stretch those levy dollars as much as feasible while maintaining and in some cases increasing the level of service.

During this particular planning process, the stakeholders attempted to focus most of their thoughts and comments primarily on the department’s Fire Suppression & Prevention services. However, as was soon discovered while in meeting discussions, it was often difficult to ignore

the department's Emergency Medical Services/Ambulance activities because it is such an integral part of its overall mission. That is why the stakeholders involved in the planning meetings (see list below) decided to designate one of the department's primary goals for this 2010 to 2013 plan related to that service.

The 14 stakeholders who participated in the five strategic planning meetings were:

- Dick Baumgart (Merrill Police & Fire Commission)
- Carrie Bezier (Merrill Area Public Schools)
- Anne Caylor (City of Merrill Council)
- Mike Drury (Merrill Fire Department)
- Steve Hass (City of Merrill Council)
- Steve Hintze (Merrill Fire Department)
- Sister Peggy Jackelen (Bell Tower Residence)
- Josh Klug (Merrill Fire Department)
- Sue Kunkel (City of Merrill Council)
- Gene Mootz (Town of Scott)
- Chief Bob Odegard (Merrill Fire Department)
- Kent Reinhardt (Wisconsin Public Service)
- Dave Sukow (City of Merrill Council)
- Jeremy Thompson (City of Merrill Council)



Except for the primary goals listed below, how the plan is implemented will change based on the ebb and flow of resources, including grant dollars, that both the department and the city can put towards implementing action steps. Action plans themselves will likely become more detailed as the department with its city partner gets into the mechanics of pursuing goals.

The five prioritized goals are:

- **Does it make sense for the city to acquire the EMS service?** (Currently, the county contracts with the city to provide EMS/ambulance.)

- **How does the Fire Department and city better communicate the needs of the department and what it does for area residents? (education)**
- **What must be done to identify the most viable option for establishing a centralized fire station that allows the department to continue providing the highest quality service while increasing its efficiency?**
- **How do we increase staffing levels and create departmental efficiencies using methods like a paid on call (POC) model/combo department?**
- **How does the Fire Department replace the old equipment (primarily fire trucks/pumper) and technology that it currently utilizes?**

These goals, potential strategies and suggested action items to complete them, along with an analysis of what will hinder and promote achieving them, can be found beginning on page 16.

Being the first time that such a plan was created by this department, it was important for the University of Wisconsin-Extension facilitator to educate those taking part in the process about the value of strategic planning especially as it relates to helping the department focus its limited resources on the things that matter the most.

Leading up to strategic issue identification, the planning group conducted an external and internal situation analysis where a limited amount of visioning occurred, discussed the expected results of the department's activities, listed the department's core values and operational principles, developed a new departmental mission statement, created goals based on identified strategic issues, and developed basic, "starter" action plans for each. Discussion points are outlined in the rest of this report.

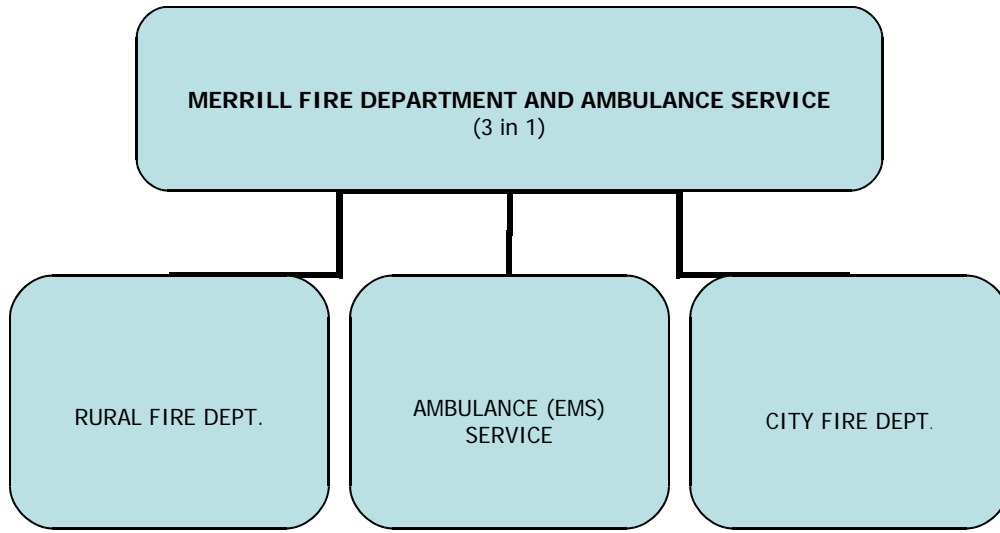
As is the case with any newly developed strategic plan, this one will not be implemented unless it is formally approved by the organization's primary oversight committee(s). In this case, it is recommended that both the Police/Fire Commission and City Council sanction the plan. By doing so, these entities become partners with the department as it pursues its goals.

Internal & External Situation Analysis

During the first planning meeting, and after a detailed presentation by fire staff about the department and the services it provides, the group began engaging in an internal and external situation analysis using something called the SOAR + C Model.

For this planning project, "S" stood for the department's strengths primarily as they related to Fire Suppression/Prevention services. The "O" was for opportunities that are or may become available to the department and that it should pursue. "A" was for aspirations, or the planning group's preferred future related to the particular service being discussed and/or the

department as a whole. And the “R” was for what stakeholders believed should be the primary short and medium term results of the Fire Suppression/Prevention service.



No strategic planning process would be complete without

discussing challenges, (“C”) both current and potential. This way of conducting the situational analysis of both the internal and external factors influencing the department seemed to help members of the planning group focus mostly on the positive features of service delivery, something that is atypical of many government planning processes.

Group members first began the analysis by answering “How has the general environment in which the Merrill Fire Department works changed significantly within the last several years?” Their responses were:

- The department went from 25 to 23 personnel. Seven person shifts were reduced to six person shifts. This reduction in staffing has increased the risk management aspect of fighting fires. This has led to increased danger for both fire personnel and the public. Personnel have to engage in more multitasking.
- The one benefit of the new system (shifts) is that a training officer now works days. That means all department members receive consistent, daily training.
- More unusual fire situations have arisen. For example, the department may be called out to suppress a fire caused by a methamphetamine laboratory, something that was

not the case just a few years ago. Because of the more varied fire situations, the scope of expertise within the department has expanded. Also, the technology utilized to fight fires has become more sophisticated and necessary.

- The department now requires that all new hires be paramedics.
- Requirements for becoming a Merrill firefighter are now constantly increasing.
- Several townships in the area that the department used to provide Fire Suppression/Prevention services to now have their own volunteer fire departments. As a result, revenue for contractual services once provided by the city to these towns has decreased substantially. Some benefits of this new reality include that there is more opportunity for mutual aid, the city department has less area to cover, and more interdepartmental cross training takes place. (However, the cross training also takes additional time, time that Merrill department personnel often cannot afford to give.)
- Cross-training has become more complex. This can be a positive because firefighters are better equipped to handle a multitude of situations. It can also be a negative because more complexity could lead to mistakes, especially by volunteer firefighters in the towns who have less experience and training than their professional counterparts at the city.
- The department as a whole has a much better idea of what it does. It is now forced to follow its own actions more closely to satisfy demands by city government and to a degree the public for increased accountability.
- City money is no longer set aside to purchase equipment. Other revenue sources that were used to buy equipment, such as from townships that use to contract with the department to provide services, no longer exist.
- Improved technology makes fighting fires more effective. There is substantial evidence that this technology has helped the department hold property damage to a minimum, saving hundreds of thousands of dollars.
- The department now utilizes almost every piece of equipment on nearly every call.

Strengths

Information from the department presentation as well as staff's personal knowledge of their department led to a wide array of items being identified.

- Turnout and response times are very good. (24/7 coverage.) In 2009, the department achieved an average turnout time (i.e. the time it takes to get into the vehicles once the call is dispatched) of 53 seconds. In the same year, the average response (i.e. the time it takes once in the vehicles leave the station to get to the scene) time was 2 minutes, 52 seconds. Both statistics are highly comparable to other departments of similar size and resources.



- Cross – training (especially within the department). This is a strength despite the fact that such trainings can be difficult to schedule, volunteer fire fighter skills are not in many cases equal to the city's professional fire fighters' experience and qualifications, and because of equipment differences from department to department. [Following the meeting, Chief Odegard mentioned that at this time cross – training with other departments in the area, mostly volunteer, is not taking place, although the Merrill department is attempting to encourage it.]
- Fire department education to youth and the community as a whole. The department's professional firefighters engage in high level educational activities that are broad in scope. Often, the city's department personnel will take educational programs to the people, not the other way around (although some things are taught at the fire station.)
- The presence of a training office provides consistent training to staff across the board. This has helped to foster "team fire fighting" where the department's personnel in general can afford to be more aggressive. The additional training has also provided them with more useful firefighting knowledge and skills which translates into lives and property being spared.
- Characteristics of department personnel. They do a great deal of volunteer work in the community. The shift system certainly helps promote these activities, but it must be emphasized that personnel choose to use their free time for most of the community work they perform.
- Full-time, professional department. It is somewhat unusual for a city with a depressed tax – base like Merrill to have a full-time, professional department. This shows how committed the city is to providing the best fire protection and ambulance/EMS service possible.
- The scope of services that are provided is impressive considering the limited manpower.

- New technology, including the ladder truck, utilized in fighting fires.
- The broad scope of the fire inspection program which helps lead to more fire prevention.
- A motivated, energetic fire prevention crew.
- Number of service years and expertise of the personnel. This helps the public feel safe/secure.

Potential Opportunities

The positive thinking nature of the group is reflected in the fact that it identified many more potential opportunities than it did challenges.

- Mutual aid training with the area's rural departments. Although it is clear that Merrill's professional fire department probably has much more to offer to the volunteer departments than the other way around, many Merrill staff still feel the trainings could foster collaborative efforts that would be beneficial to all participants. (i.e. Knowing more about one another's skills could help the rural and professional fire fighters to work better together when fighting fires).
- The department needs to be more involved in the city's growth. There needs to be more collaboration with city departments that regulate things like sprinkler connections and building safety issues.
- Promote our services. An effective fire department can help attract or retain businesses concerned about fire hazard and other safety issues. Work with existing groups such as the chamber and the Merrill Marketing Group to promote the department's very good record at preventing and fighting fires, leading to good insurance (ISO) ratings, must occur. Facts about the department's equipment, response time/building location, water supply, and manpower should be key talking/presentation points. Place positive information about the department and its services on the new (soon to be) city website or on a department webpage.
- Support the completion of the Merrill NTC fire training facility. This could help to foster more mutual aid training. More equipment is needed at the NTC facility to make high level mutual aid training possible.
- Opportunity to work more with the city to make sure its sprinkler codes are up to standard. The collaboration has improved over the past several years, but could be even better.

- Promote services to attract new residents. Increased safety due to fire department activities is a potential draw for families looking to possibly move to the area. The department and the services it provides are community strengths.
- City should acquire the county ambulance service. This will likely create more revenues for the department and the city. This revenue could be used to help bolster Fire Suppression/Prevention services.



- Educating the public about staff realities. For example, the public needs to understand that nine department staff are essentially paid by the county. There are only 14 staff on the city payroll.
- Advocate for the hiring of additional firefighters to conduct building inspections. More inspectors could possibly generate additional revenue. (The department currently does not have the manpower to do this.)
- A new fire station can possibly help to create synergies with other city departments. Some other departments could perhaps have offices in the new building. It might be possible to house equipment that can be used, for instance, by both the Fire and Transportation departments. Grant funding might be possible to help develop these synergies.
- If a central station is built, the current station could be bought and returned to the tax rolls. (One entity has already expressed interest in purchasing the current main station.)
- Get even more involved with businesses in the community through the department's chamber membership.
- Use existing newsletters/media to educate people about the department.

Aspirations

Group members were given the following scenario as a way to help them think about and discuss aspirations related to Fire suppression/Prevention services and the department as a whole.

"You have been asleep for five years. You awaken to find that Fire Suppression/Prevention Service 'miracles' have taken place as a result of the department and/or city activities related to the service. The department's and the city's capacity/resources changed little over the five year period. What do you see happening that is new, positive and different?"

- New fire station on one level and centrally located in the downtown.
- No 35 year old fire trucks sitting in the station unless they require minimal maintenance. (New equipment needed for certain functions.)
- If a new station is built, it will be large enough to hold all of the equipment, some of which is currently kept outside. Keeping equipment out of the elements will help preserve it and lead to less maintenance costs.
- Fewer fire calls due to fire prevention activities. Aspire to see 0 fire calls in Merrill (or as few as possible.)
- Significantly less loss of life, injuries, and property.
- Community wants to continue professional fire service.
- Use large training center in new fire station as a community room, and possibly as a new community enrichment center. The building should have multiple uses.
- Maintain/increase personnel.
- The department has and uses a computer-based dispatch system. Address records are currently being kept on index cards. In general, there should be a dispatch system technology upgrade.
- Department stays on the leading edge. The department has what it takes to provide excellent service (technology, equipment, etc.)

Expected Results

- Older population feels more secure as a result of the services provided by the department.
- Possible negative outcome: Emphasis of providing services to older adults could mean that services for the rest of the population may be strained.

- Measurable reduction in preventable fires. People use what they learned in prevention education classes provided by the department.
- Progressively less loss of life and property.
- Fewer injuries to firefighters.
- Continued receipt of good audits for inspection programs.
- Response time (Difference between professional versus volunteer; round the clock staff.)
- Department ratings from the ISO must always be very good.

Challenges

- City budget issues are preventing us from upgrading our older equipment which presently requires too much maintenance.
- Maintaining or increasing the budget for the department to make sure the firefighters have what they need to do their job effectively.
- How can Council and the taxpayers be convinced that the city should invest in a new fire station? (How can the need be demonstrated? How can the mindset of not wanting to invest money be changed?)



- What is the trade off for having a new station? Would staff have to be reduced to help pay for it? (It is possible that the department would rather retain staffing levels than have a new station.)

- Is there a way to reverse the attitude that maybe we don't need an excellent department? Would it be appropriate to convince/enlighten people that we cannot put a price on the benefits of having an excellent fire department?
- It is sometimes a challenge that the fire department does both Fire Suppression/Prevention and EMS/ambulance. This occasionally causes staffing shortages at crucial times.
- City should acquire the county ambulance service. This will likely create more revenues for the department and the city. Revenue could be used to help bolster Fire Suppression/Prevention services. (Also seen as an opportunity.) The Tomahawk/Merrill divide with regard to fire services may make negotiations with the county on this subject somewhat difficult. (What is the benefit for the county?)
- City leaders are seemingly at odds with departments. Must work together for common goal.
- Doing more with less.
- The general state of the local economy.

Core Values/Operational Principles

In preparation for mission statement development, staff and the other stakeholders in the planning group identified the department's primary core values and operational principles. Core values and when appropriate operational principles, the facilitator explained, should be the heart of any effective mission statement.

- Community oriented
- Dedication
- Desire to learn more, to upgrade skills (attitude.)
- Pride in job (motivated by peer pressure)
- Professionalism
- Unity/teamwork (more so now than before)
- Hire people with same qualities as existing staff. (Maintain high standards by being selective about who joins the department).
- Compassion

- Commitment to high standards
- Commitment to training. (Multifaceted training to deliver the best services possible and to keep up with mandates).

Mandates

The fire chief and staff provided an overview of the department's formal and informal mandates based on the definitions below. Formal and informal mandates can help stakeholders identify goals. If a formal mandate, for instance, is not being met, it may quickly become an important goal for the department to pursue in order to comply with regulation.

Formal mandates are written laws, rules, procedures, and regulations etc. that the organization must or should abide by.

Informal mandates are those rules, procedures, and regulations etc. that the organization feels it must abide by even though they are not explicitly codified.

Formal

- Wisconsin Department of Commerce Regulations state what we (department staff) must do to safely operate.
- City ordinances relating to items like inspection, fireworks regulations, building codes, and public non-interference regulations. City ordinances also define the fire district.
- National Fire Protection Association federal standards for matters such as the appropriate minimum number of firefighters there should be on a job.
- Occupational Safety & Health Association rules and procedures.
- Facility standards rules.
- Internal written policies on how to implement services, etc.
- Contract between the city and union representing firefighters.



Informal

- Past practices (tradition)
- How station operates (i.e. professional demeanor)

- Core values
- Citizen expectations
- Fire service codes of conduct

Mission Statement Development

The facilitator taught group members the difference between mission and vision statements using the basic information presented below.

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. Mission statements are fluid and should be reviewed periodically and particularly throughout strategic planning processes. They often let people know why the organization is unique. Good mission statements help to provide guidance so that an organization can focus on what is truly important.

A **vision statement** focuses on the **future**. Rather than stating the current purpose of the organization, vision statements convey what stakeholders, or those who can place claim on or are affected by an organization’s activities, hope the organization will look like at some point. Like mission statements, vision statements should be kept concise. Although a vision statement can be formulated any time during a strategic planning effort, it is usually recommended that one be constructed toward the end of that process. This allows ample time for a stakeholder group to discuss and think about organizational vision during each step of strategic planning. In some cases, it may help to have a clear, concise, agreed upon vision before engaging in strategic planning. In order to create a shared vision, or one that a large majority of the organization’s stakeholders agree is appropriate, it is helpful for those who are drafting the statement to understand the organization’s purpose, its core values, its basic strategies, and its decision-making rules. Although they should be grounded in reality, vision statements talk about dreams and thus should be a source of inspiration to organization stakeholders. The facilitator also reminded group members that the organization’s goals must further its mission. The mission statement is much more than a string of words. The organization must constantly live and breathe what is in the statement.

Next, group members began the statement development process by reviewing a mission document written by the fire chief and the core values/operational principles of the department that were identified during the previous meeting. The facilitator then asked group members to state key words or phrases that most describe the current purpose of the department and why it is unique. During the discussion, group members also identified themes that convey how the fire department does its work. The following lists were generated:

Purpose: The “What”

- Preserve/protect life and property; promote safety; preventative services
- Prevent harm

- Merrill area

Method: The "How"

- With compassion, honesty and integrity
- Quality and efficiency
- Full – time (staff)
- High performance
- Timely manner (relates mostly to fire suppression)
- Service
- Training
- Dedicated
- Committed



Following this short exercise, the facilitator broke the large group up into three small work units. Each unit was given the task of developing a draft mission statement using the information above, the core values/operational principles, and the chief's document for guidance.

The work units were also reminded by the facilitator that mission statements are not mere sentences or a collection of words but essentially creeds that organizations must live by. Departmental goals must relate closely to the overall mission. The statement should also be easily understood by the public, meaning that the instant it is read, citizens should understand the primary, unique current purpose of the organization.

The following draft statements were developed by the work units.

- The mission of the Merrill Fire Department is to prevent harm, preserve life, and protect property in the Greater Merrill Area, utilizing a professional, highly trained staff.
- Professional team work preserving the life and property of the Merrill area through quality protective services.

- The mission of the Merrill Fire Department and EMS is to prevent harm, preserve life, and protect property of the citizens of our protection area. We carry this out in a professional, timely manner with compassion, honesty, integrity and teamwork.

Guided by the facilitator, the large group used a modified wordsmithing technique to consolidate the statements. The most common themes in the statements were used as a basis to develop the following:

“The mission of the Merrill Fire Department is to prevent harm, preserve life, and protect property utilizing a team of compassionate, highly trained professionals.”

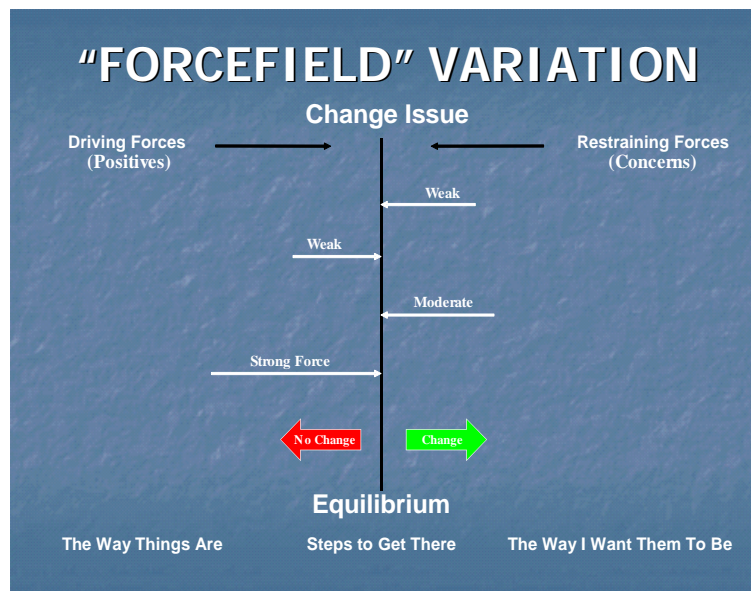
Group consensus was that this is a solid mission statement that conveys the current primary purpose of the department and how that purpose is carried out. During the next meeting, group members formerly moved and unanimously approved the statement.

Identifying Strategic Issues, Setting Goals & Action Planning

Ideas or themes that were discussed most in previous meetings in the end became the priorities that the organization will focus on in the coming few years.

For purposes of identifying strategic issues, the facilitator divided the larger group into two work units. Each unit reviewed SOAR analysis results and other discussion points from the previous three meetings. The analysis and discussion points were used as a basis to choose strategic issues. After their deliberations, the work units were brought together to compare/contrast their lists of strategic issues. For the most part, the lists were very similar. Based on the lists, the following goals and basic action plans to achieve them were developed by the group during its last meeting.

Included in this section is a force field analysis based on the page 17 diagram. Using this diagram, the facilitator asked the group to identify driving forces promoting goal achievement and restraining forces making it difficult to bring about change. In several cases, the group began thinking how to eliminate or mitigate restraining forces. The purpose of the exercise was to impress upon the stakeholders in the room (and those who read the strategic plan) how important it is to determine up front how to take advantage of driving forces and how to mitigate impediments.



Goal (A)

Does it make sense for the city to acquire the EMS service? (Currently, the county contracts with the city to provide EMS/ambulance.)

<i>Driving</i>	<i>Restraining</i>
Additional revenue.	How will/can the county provide the service? (Afford to provide it?)
What are the options? (Excuse to explore)	Are there options?
Could allow us to address more staffing issues (more paramedics will = more firefighters). Look at increasing efficiencies.	Negotiating with county can be difficult if department/city cannot show up front how the county would be benefitted. (Need to make strong argument with favorable numbers, etc.)
Could outsource the bookwork which may lead to efficiencies in that area	Have to do or arrange for someone else to do the bookwork.
Improve staffing (required additional training with professionals, etc.)	County currently owns the ambulances. (This could also be a driving force because it may want to sell the vehicles to the city)

Initial action steps are:

- Work with city administrator and finance director to develop a cost/benefit analysis clearly showing the fiscal impacts for the city and county.
- If favorable, use the analysis to help persuade City Council and the Mayor that the long-term positive fiscal impact considerably outweighs the initial investment.

- Approach the county with city cost/benefit analysis numbers (show county side of ledger as well).
- Encourage county to conduct their own cost/benefit study to see how it might afford to provide the service.
- Study how the Rhinelander Fire Department provides the service (logistics, costs, efficiencies, etc.). Can the Rhinelander program be used as a model? How might Merrill have to do things differently?

The group agreed that this analysis should begin in year one of the strategic plan.

Goal (B)

How does the Fire Department and city better communicate the needs of the department and what it does for area residents? (education)

Driving	Restraining
Possibility of having our website linked to other sites.	Budget (Money to develop communication pieces is lacking). Is there a way that some of this public relations can pay for itself? (e.g. web advertising)
Can design a website for both internal (residents) and external (non-residents) use. Information pertinent to residents can easily be placed on the site.	Need IT person? The city needs to provide us with more information about whether it wants to create an IT department.
A great deal of information that could be placed on the site, in newspapers, etc. has already been prepared.	Website maintenance/upkeep
Motivation: Must continue to provide public with good fire prevention education.	Receiving mixed messages from the city regarding website creation. Can we move forward on our own? Should we?
Motivation: Potential to promote the department and what it does.	Time that is needed to develop the information resources.
Making people more knowledgeable about the department will help them become more supportive of it.	Making the materials "user friendly."
Website and other communication materials can be based on templates that already exist.	
Local students can possibly help develop the website and even other public relations materials.	

Initial action steps are:

- Write and publish a “Did you Know” article. The article should include basic information about the department and its services. (e.g. How many runs were made last year compared to previous years? Number of staff, etc.)
- Continue doing radio spots (“Our Town.”)
- Discuss and look into feasibility of using other, less traditional medium to communicate. (Would it be possible, for example, to use billboards?)
- Have easy to read signs around town pointing to the department’s location.
Other possible action steps include but are not limited to:
- Distribute newsletters
- Regular newspaper submissions (articles/press releases)
- Continue and when feasible increase community presence through volunteer work, providing educational seminars, etc.

Group members agreed that work to achieve this goal should begin immediately.

Goal (C)

What must be done to identify the most viable option for establishing a centralized fire station that allows the department to continue providing the highest quality service while increasing its efficiency?

Driving	Restraining
Need for space.	Cost. Are there enough grant dollars?
Grant dollars are available. (Can department obtain them?)	Centralized station would mean that the department would move further away from some in its service area. (Could they be educated that the benefits outweigh the drawbacks?)
Initial feasibility study recommended numerous advantages to having a centralized station.	
Centralized station could be a catalyst for staff helping them to obtain efficiencies	Would staff have to be eliminated in order to help pay for it?
Station #2 would likely be placed back on the tax rolls generating revenue for the city.	

A centralized station could include enough space to co-locate departments, equipment, etc.	
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Initial action steps are:

- Conduct cost/benefit study to build on existing, recently completed feasibility study. Convince city administration and residents of numbers.
- Inventory and evaluate potential locations. (Look for existing, vacant buildings; does not have to be new building).

Other possible action steps include but are not limited to:

- Research and apply for non tax levy funding either on our own or in conjunction with other city and perhaps county departments.
- Evaluate service advantages and disadvantages based on possible locations and other factors such as building/lot size.
- Evaluate manpower advantages/disadvantages related to possible options.
- Explore the possibility of sharing space with other city departments such as Transportation.
- Look into the possibility of rehabilitating current primary station #1.

Although group members stated that some preliminary work could be done in the first two years of the plan, most of the meaningful work pertaining to this goal would likely be completed in the third year.

Goal (D)

How do we increase staffing levels and create departmental efficiencies using methods like a paid on call (POC) model/combo department?

Driving	Restraining
Reduce costs/overtime.	Are there enough qualified people in the area to hire as POCs?
Could lead to stronger evaluations of people if you are looking to hire another full-timer (POC experiences).	What are the turnaround times of many POCs? Many POCs have day jobs. How would this affect their ability to respond quickly or at all?

Volunteer POC personnel are not paid.	What is the commitment level of POCs? It may be difficult to find POCs who would drop everything to respond to a call.
Probably would increase department manpower especially during difficult fire suppression situations.	This is a union contract issue. Would union support POC concept/hires?
POCs from surrounding volunteer fire departments would become much more familiar with City of Merrill firefighting protocols through joint training with department full-time personnel.	POCs would have to train with professional fire staff during the days. Since many have day jobs, is this possible? (Would they be able to learn our protocols enough to be of benefit?)
Possibility of creating a stronger partnership with those looking to further develop the NTC training site	Because they do not receive payment, would that reduce POC's motivation to serve?

Initial action steps are:

- Research/determine minimum training standards for certification
- Benchmarks: Research how other departments do this and how POCs and similar models help them gain efficiencies without reducing their ability to serve the public. (Choose to study departments that serve a similar number of people as Merrill.)



Other possible action steps include but are not limited to:

- Look into various options related to changing the department's organizational structure in such a way as to help reduce overtime while increasing efficiency and effectiveness.
- Ascertain ways that a POC or similar model can be instituted while maintaining a professional, full-time staff.

Considering the city's current budget/fiscal situation, group members agreed that work on this goal should begin immediately.

Goal (E)

How does the Fire Department replace the old equipment (primarily fire trucks/pumper) and technology that it currently utilizes?

Driving	Restraining
Great need to replace aging equipment.	Determining how to finance the new equipment.
The department already has the information about what kind of equipment is needed. (What works/best fit).	
New equipment makes most everything in the department run more efficiently (including schedules and manpower).	
New equipment would reduce liability.	
Maintain or improve ISO rating.	
Allows us to be more proactive versus reactive. (More maintenance and high maintenance costs makes the department more reactive>)	

Initial action steps are:

- Develop a budget (Is there a possibility of leasing equipment? If so, what are the costs/benefits?)
- Prioritize replacement list. (Much of the information is already compiled.)

Other possible action steps include but are not limited to:

- Convince stakeholders that equipment and technology changes are needed by showing how the cost to maintain out-dated equipment and technology over time is more than the cost of buying new or up-to-date. (Reversing the long-term versus short-term mentality and maintaining or improving the department's ISO rating.)
- Determine if there are possibilities to share equipment/technology (purchase and use) with other city departments, county departments or with other fire departments in the area.
- Tap into experts on the subject to help give the department a clearer picture as to what new or up-to-date equipment and technologies are most needed.
- Conduct cost/benefit analysis on GPS systems.

Group members agreed that old equipment is costing the department and city a great deal and must be replaced as soon as possible.

Possible Indicators of Success

The last portion of the strategic planning process was devoted to identifying a few very basic performance indicators related to the goals. The facilitator stated that he would be willing to help the department develop an evaluation/outcomes measurement plan. The few indicators that were mentioned were:

- The department provides better protection to those it serves.
- Maintenance records for new equipment show substantial cost and time savings. (Less equipment downtime.)
- Fire prevention education is valued by those who go through it and they admit that it has helped them take sensible precautionary measures to prevent fire.
- Citizen satisfaction is maintained and/or improves.



Conclusion

As is the case with many organizations, the City of Merrill Fire Department does not have the capacity to address many critical strategic issues at once. It is also possible that while attempting to implement the plan department staff may find it difficult to pursue one or more of the priorities described in the previous section. There is considerable overlap, however, amongst the organization's prioritized goals. For example, adequately addressing building/space issues may very well help the department to create more efficient ways of utilizing staff. It will be helpful for the staff, city administration, and the Police/Fire Commission to identify these linkages in the attempt to develop more comprehensive action plans that help address multiple issues, perhaps even some that not identified as short – term organizational priorities.

Perhaps most important, the strategic planning process has helped Merrill Fire Department Staff and Council members begin meaningful dialogue about how the organization can remain viable into the foreseeable future. The formal approval of this plan by the Police and Fire

Commission and City Council will reaffirm how important it is to continue that dialogue and the strategizing that will inevitably come with further discussions.