

Action Plan

The Implementation Plan reflects a 10-year program of actions that will help Merrimac achieve the goals of its new Master Plan. When Merrimac prepares a master plan update in 2012, the committee in charge of that process should evaluate the town's performance under this Implementation Plan and prepare a new agenda for the ensuing 5- to 10-year period. The present action plan focuses on three issues: regulating growth, increasing local capacity, and investing in community development.

Development Regulations

The Master Plan Steering Committee correctly identified zoning as Merrimac's key barrier to managing the community's growth. Most of the major action items described in this section call for developing new zoning bylaws, other regulations and policies. They should take priority over other, albeit important, steps to implement the Master Plan. Merrimac is a small community with limited resources. Although a number of needs exist, the town must address fundamental zoning policy weaknesses or it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to achieve its goals or to implement other recommendations of the Master Plan. For example:

- Reluctance to adopt a cluster development bylaw after the last master plan was written (1977) reduced Merrimac's ability to preserve important open space. Instead, Approval-Not-Required (ANR) lots proliferated along the town's rural roadways, and conventional subdivisions of one- and two-acre lots resulted in more land consumption per dwelling unit after 1985 than had been the case in the past.
- In the absence of regulatory techniques to include low-income or below-market homes in new developments, Merrimac became vulnerable to the loss of local control that comes with comprehensive permits under Chapter 40B. As a result, Merrimac's zoning board of appeals received four comprehensive permit applications during the past year – including a 468-unit rental development. By the time Merrimac acts on all four applications, the town may reach or exceed the 10% low-income housing unit threshold set by Chapter 40B. However, Merrimac's housing needs are more complicated than the meaning of "need" in Chapter 40B. The town needs more elderly housing, not only for low-income elders (who will benefit from at least one of the four proposals), but also for middle-income senior citizens who lack housing choice. A second area of need, evident in economic data and development trends, is below-market housing for individuals and small households. The market in Merrimac is producing an ample supply of single-family residences, but not small homes, whether attached or detached. Moreover, through renovation and expansion, the town's base of older, small homes has become captive to market demand for large single-family dwelling units.

- Residents speak fondly of their town center, yet differences between Merrimac Square's historic buildings and its more recent, out-of-character development attest to the inappropriateness of Commercial District regulations for the village area. Although Merrimac Square is a local landmark, it is regulated as a strip commercial area.
- Merrimac expects to develop a new water supply, but the approval process is complicated because the well site lies across the state border in Newton, New Hampshire. For the next few years – possibly longer – Merrimac must manage with its existing drinking water sources, which the town is already pumping in excess of levels authorized by the state. Even if the Water Department receives DEP permission to increase its current water withdrawal permits, Merrimac will not have surplus water. Conservation is critical, yet the town's zoning bylaw promotes development that consumes far more water per unit than the amount used by older forms of development.

Local Capacity

Capacity will continue to act as a limiting factor in Merrimac until the town invests in an adequate complement of staff to support the work of local government. Town meeting wisely has agreed to increase the Building Inspector's hours, and over the coming year, Merrimac will consider merging several departments into one Department of Public Works. The Implementation Plan anticipates that in a few years, Merrimac will also establish the position of town planner. The boards and committees that administer development regulations – the Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Board of Health and Zoning Board of Appeals – need professional support and their efforts need to be coordinated. Simply stated, Merrimac cannot expect to manage growth unless it has management capacity.

Residents of small towns cherish the tradition of government by volunteers because they believe it gives them greater control. The Master Plan vision statement reinforces the desirability of Merrimac's Board of Selectmen-Town Meeting form of government. Given the town's population projections, a Board of Selectmen-Town Meeting form of government is appropriate for the foreseen future. However, the current system of multiple elected boards and individual office holders, coupled with a very small municipal staff, will become obsolete. Merrimac should embark on a town government study in the next five to seven years, the results of which will likely influence the Master Plan's next 10-year implementation cycle.

Community Development

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2003, Merrimac will renovate and modernize its Town Hall. During the construction period, town offices will be stationed in temporary quarters at the Old Senior Center on School Street. The town also expects to build a new library on a site outside of (but close to) Merrimac Square within the next few years. Although these projects will address Merrimac's most

critical public facility needs, they create an important challenge: to develop a suitable disposition plan for the Old Senior Center and the Thomas H. Hoyt Library. In fact, there are other historic buildings in Merrimac that should be evaluated for their redevelopment and adaptive reuse potential, but they are privately owned. Consistent with recommendations made to increase Merrimac's local government capacity, the town needs an economic development commission. It may also need a non-profit community development corporation or an economic development and industrial corporation created through a special act of the legislature. Working with an organization that can obtain development resources will help Merrimac plan and carry out an appropriate disposition strategy for its public buildings and may also strengthen the town's ability to work with owners of difficult-to-develop, historically significant sites.

Merrimac has other community investment needs, the most obvious of which is open space. The Town Forest is a large land holding, yet overall, the amount of protected open space per capita in Merrimac is quite low. Zoning will help Merrimac increase its protected open space, but zoning alone will not address all of the town's open space and recreation needs. For example, at least one of the small town landings on the Merrimack River has potential to provide public access to the water, but the town needs a plan and funding to develop basic public amenities there. In addition, Merrimac should save money to buy open space just as it saves money in the Stabilization Fund for a wide variety of public purposes. Annual appropriations to the Conservation Fund are essential to any open space program. Even though taxpayers dislike spending more money, the reality is that in the long run, acquiring open space is fiscally advantageous for most communities. An approach used in other cities and towns, the open space bond authorization, should be considered in Merrimac as debt service for existing commitments (including the Town Hall) begins to decline. Merrimac also has to address the adequacy and condition of its recreation facilities, notably the poor condition of playing fields at Carriagetown Park. A concerted effort by open space and recreation supporters to produce timely open space and recreation plan updates will help Merrimac qualify for reimbursement grants.

The Implementation Plan omits action to acquire a future school site. Merrimac's elementary schools appear to be adequate for current and projected school enrollments through 2010. Under build-out conditions, however, Merrimac will generate more children than the existing schools can accommodate. The town should be prepared to acquire land for school facilities at some point in the future. The need to act may be accelerated by a substantial, near-term increase in homes suitable for family occupancy, including units in the proposed affordable housing developments.

MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

Subject Area/Action	Responsible Parties	Approximate Year	Estimated Cost	Potential Funding Source(s) & Remarks
Adopt the Master Plan	MerrPB	2002	N/A	
ZONING				
<u>Phase I Zoning Amendments</u>				
Amend Zoning Definitions	MerrPB	2002	N/A	*
Amend Table of Uses	MerrPB	2002	N/A	*
Amend Table of Dimensional Regulations	MerrPB	2002	N/A	*
Establish Village Center District	MerrPB	2002	N/A	*
Adopt Site Plan Review bylaw	MerrPB	2002	N/A	*
Adopt Common Driveway/ Reduced Frontage bylaws	MerrPB	2002	N/A	*
Establish Rural Highway District	MerrPB	2002	N/A	*
Adopt "Demolition Delay" bylaw	MerrPB/MHC	2002	N/A	*
Zoning Map Amendments	MerrPB	2002	\$ 3,500	E.O. 418/Other

*Text amendments supplied by master plan consultants.

MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

Subject Area/Action	Responsible Parties	Approximate Year	Estimated Cost	Potential Funding Source(s) & Remarks
<u>Phase II Zoning Amendments</u>				
Establish Village Residential Overlay District	MerrPB	2003	\$ 2,800	E.O. 418/Other
Establish Highway Services District	MerrPB	2003	\$ 2,500	E.O. 418/Other
Adopt Conservation-Residential (Cluster) Bylaw	MerrPB	2003	\$ 2,100	E.O. 418/Other
Establish Wetlands-Water Resource Protection District	MerrPB	2003	\$ 2,500	E.O. 418/Other
Adopt Over-55 Housing Bylaw	MerrPB	2003	\$ 1,575	E.O. 418/Other
Establish Conservation-Agricultural District	MerrPB	2003	\$ 3,300	E.O. 418/Other
Establish Conservation-Institutional Overlay District	MerrPB	2003	\$ 3,825	E.O. 418/Other
Zoning Map Amendments*	MerrPB	2003	\$ 1,500	E.O. 418/Other
				\$ 23,600
Zoning Bylaws				

*Includes new Zone II Areas

MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

Subject Area/Action	Responsible Parties	Approximate Year	Estimated Cost	Potential Funding Source(s) & Remarks
OTHER BYLAWS & REGULATIONS				
Amend sewer bylaw (restrict service area)	SC/MerrPB	2003	\$ 3,500	E.O. 418/Other
Adopt Scenic Roads bylaw; designate additional Scenic Roads	MerrPB	2005	\$ 1,200	Town
Adopt local wetlands protection bylaw	CC	2005	\$ 1,000	Town
Adopt septic system cleaning/maintenance regulations	BOH	2005	\$ 500	Town
Establish local historic district in Merrimac Center*	MerrHC	2008	\$ 5,000	MHC
Establish local historic district on River Rd. in Merrimacport*	MerrHC	2009	\$ 5,000	MHC
Other Bylaws & Regulations			\$ 16,200	

*These are public education costs; survey & planning costs covered in next section.

PLANNING

Open Space & Recreation Plan update	MCC	2003	\$ 2,500	E.O. 418/Town
Develop affordable housing plan/strategy	MerrHP	2005	\$ 25,000	CDBG
Adopt local initiative/affordable housing guidelines	MerrHP	2005		N/A
Commission study to improve Carriagetown Park playing fields	MerrP/R	2005	\$ 15,000	Town
Seek Survey & Planning Grants to prepare historic property surveys*	MerrHC	2006	\$ 20,000	MHC/Town

MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

Subject Area/Action	Responsible Parties	Approximate Year	Estimated Cost	Potential Funding Source(s) & Remarks
PLANNING, cont'd				
Appropriate funds and/or secure grant to plan McLaren Trail improvements	MCC	2006	\$ 30,000	DEM
Regional development strategy/Route 110**	MDIC	2006	\$ 40,000	MDFA/Town/MassHighway*
Seek Survey & Planning Grants to prepare historic property surveys*	MerrHC	2007	\$ 20,000	MHC/Town
Commission reuse study of public library and old senior center****	BOS	2007	\$ 25,000	MHC/Town
Seek Survey & Planning Grants to prepare historic property surveys*	MerrHC	2008	\$ 10,000	MHC/Town
Open Space & Recreation Plan Update	MCC	2008	\$ 5,000	Town
Seek National Register nomination for Merrimac Center (district)***	MerrHC	2008	N/A	N/A
Seek National Register nomination for River Rd. in Merrimacport (district)***	MerrHC	2009	N/A	N/A
Seek National Register nominations for individual properties***	MerrHC	2010	N/A	N/A
Update Master Plan/Open Space Plan	MerrPB	2012	\$ 75,000	Town
Planning			\$ 267,500	

*Under current guidelines, Survey & Planning Grants require a 50% local match

**Project should be done as a regional initiative: Haverhill, Merrimac, Amesbury, and Salisbury. Amount shown in schedule represents local/MDFA or other grant source.

***Nomination costs should be included in Survey-Planning grant budgets

****Depending on proposed use and National Register status, study costs for library may be eligible for planning funds from Mass. Historical Commission.

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Subject Area/Action	Responsible Parties	Approximate Year	Estimated Cost	Potential Funding Source(s) & Remarks
COMMUNITY INVESTMENT				
Implement town hall renovations**	BOS	2003	\$ 2,850,000	Town
Pre-development costs: third water supply	MerrWC	2003	\$ 108,500	Water Revenue
Make annual appropriation to Conservation Fund	MerrCC	2004	\$ 50,000	Town
Upgrades to water distribution system	MerrWC	2004	\$ 400,000	Water Revenue
Make annual appropriation to Conservation Fund	MerrCC	2005	\$ 50,000	Town
Commission a study of water and sewer rates	BOS	2005	\$ 35,000	Water/Sewer Revenue
Upgrade sewer plant (Tata & Howard study)**	MerrSC	2005	\$ 1,600,000	Sewer Revenue
Make annual appropriation to Conservation Fund	MerrCC	2006	\$ 50,000	Town
Acquire land for third water standpipe**	MerrWC	2006	\$ 1,500,000	Water Revenue
Construct new library**	MerrLC	2006	\$ 2,350,000	Town/State Library Grant
Make annual appropriation to Conservation Fund	MerrCC	2007	\$ 50,000	Town
Make annual appropriation to implement TSAC plan*	TSAC	2007	\$ 50,000	Town/Chapter 90
Make annual appropriation to Conservation Fund	MerrCC	2008	\$ 50,000	Town
Make annual appropriation to implement TSAC plan*	TSAC	2008	\$ 50,000	Town/Chapter 90
Make annual appropriation to Conservation Fund	MerrCC	2009	\$ 50,000	Town
Seek bond authorization to acquire open space**	MerrCC	2009	\$ 5,000,000	Town/Self-Help
Make annual appropriation to implement TSAC plan*	TSAC	2009	\$ 50,000	Town/Chapter 90
Upgrades to water distribution system	MerrWC	2009	\$ 400,000	Water Revenue

MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

Subject Area/Action	Responsible Parties	Approximate Year	Estimated Cost	Potential Funding Source(s) & Remarks
Make annual appropriation to Conservation Fund	MerrCC	2010	\$ 50,000	Town
Make annual appropriation to implement TSAC plan*	TSAC	2010	\$ 50,000	Town/Chapter 90
Make annual appropriation to Conservation Fund	MerrCC	2011	\$ 50,000	Town
Make annual appropriation to implement TSAC plan*	TSAC	2011	\$ 50,000	Town/Chapter 90
Make annual appropriation to Conservation Fund	MerrCC	2012	\$ 50,000	Town
Make annual appropriation to implement TSAC plan*	TSAC	2012	\$ 50,000	Town/Chapter 90

Community Investment

\$ 14,993,500

*Intent is to dedicate appropriations for highway improvements toward implementing the TSAC's classification plan, not to increase highway expenditures.

**Assumes bond financing.

MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

Subject Area/Action	Responsible Parties	Approximate Year	Estimated Cost	Potential Funding Source(s) & Remarks
TRAFFIC & CIRCULATION				
Establish Traffic Safety Advisory Committee	BOS	2003	N/A	
Develop street classification plan	TSAC	2004	\$ 2,500	Town/E.O. 418/Other
Develop pavement management plan*	TSAC	2006	\$ 10,000	Town
Develop capital plan for circulation improvements	TSAC/CPC	2006	N/A	
Seek grant(s) for Scenic Corridor Plan, River Road**	TSAC/PB	2007	\$ 50,000	DEM, MassHighway
Traffic & Circulation			\$ 62,500	
*Expenditure should be deferred until town decides whether to consolidate public works operations.				
**Should be carried out jointly with neighboring communities and MVPC.				
LOCAL CAPACITY				
Establish Master Plan Implementation Group	BOS	2002	N/A	
Establish Public Works Study Committee*	BOS	2002	N/A	
Establish Merrimac Housing Partnership Committee	BOS	2003	N/A	
Establish Merrimac Development & Industrial Commission	BOS	2004	N/A	
Apply for Certified Local Government status (MHC)	MerrHC	2005	N/A	
Hire part-time planning coordinator**	MerrPB	2005	\$ 25,000	Town

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Subject Area/Action	Responsible Parties	Approximate Year	Estimated Cost	Potential Funding Source(s) & Remarks
Establish town government study committee*	BOS	2008		N/A
Establish a local development corporation/EDIC	BOS/MerrDIC	2008		N/A
Local Capacity			\$ 25,000	

*Costs of increased capacity that may be recommended by these studies cannot be predicted at this time.

**Becomes recurring local expenditure after FY 2005.