

Merrimac Master Plan

DRAFT Chapter 4: Inventory and Assessment

May 2024



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4.1 Land Use

1

Introduction

2

3 The Land Use element of a Master Plan contains two key components: an inventory of
4 existing land use patterns including how they were shaped by past development trends,
5 and an analysis of local zoning regulations, which will regulate the development of the
6 future. This section helps readers understand *where* the activities described in the other
7 elements take placing issues like economic growth, housing, and natural resources in
8 their geographic context.

9

Existing Conditions

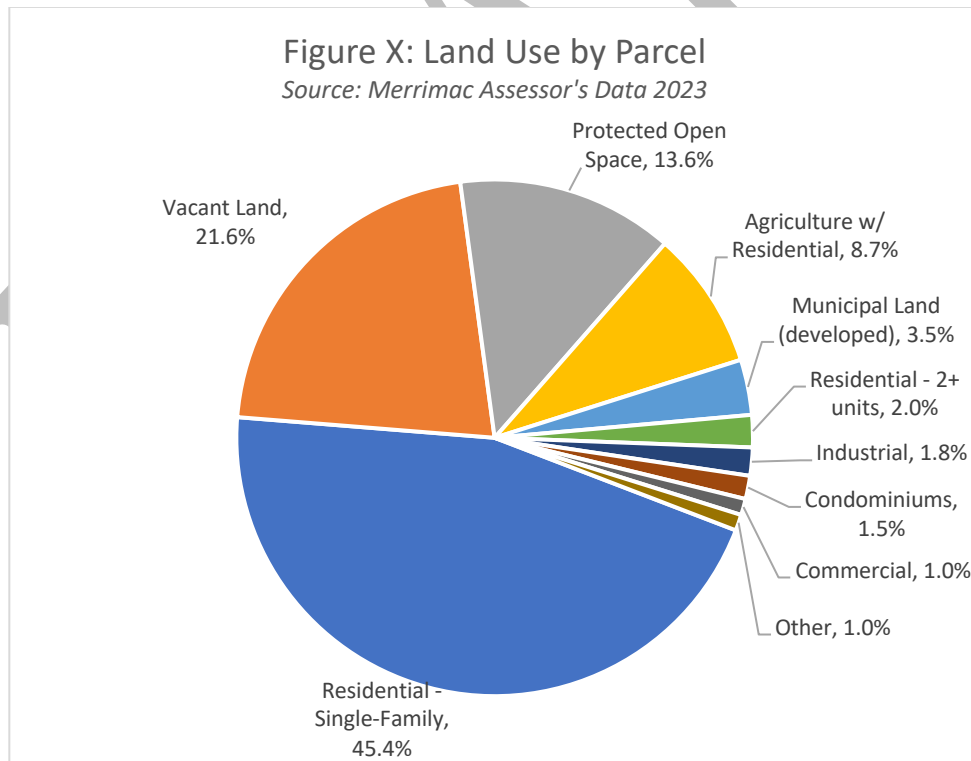
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LAND USE PATTERNS

11

12 Map X.X shows the primary land use category for every tax parcel in Merrimac,
13 according to the Town Assessors' records. Residential uses are the largest category,
14 making up almost half the Town's land area (see Figure X.X). Undeveloped parcels,
15 including those that are permanently protected as open space, make up about one-third
16 of Merrimac's area. The sections below discuss the history and current state of each
17 major land use category.

18



19

20

Residential Development

21

22 Single-family homes are the predominant land use in Merrimac, and their development
23 can be divided into two major historic trends. First, there is the traditional pattern of

1 denser housing on small lots near the village center of Merrimac Square and the historic
2 neighborhood of Merrimacport along the bank of the Merrimack River. Most homes in
3 these areas were constructed in the nineteenth century or earlier. Residential
4 development in most areas of Merrimac was limited to scattered farmhouses until
5 suburban-style subdivisions in the late twentieth century.

6
7 Merrimac has relatively few multifamily developments (defined as structures containing
8 three or more housing units) and some two-families and condominiums. Most of the
9 properties classified as two-or-three-family dwellings are concentrated downtown, while
10 denser condominium development and the Town's two mobile home parks are largely
11 located along or near Route 110. Dense residential development is also found in the lake
12 cottage communities near Lake Attitash.

13 14 *Commercial and Industrial Development*

15 While Merrimac is a primarily residential Town with only about 3 percent of its area
16 devoted to commercial or industrial uses, there is a long-standing local business
17 community. Merrimac Square is characterized by nineteenth-century brick facades and
18 ground-level commercial space, including banks, small-scale markets, and professional
19 offices. Most other businesses are located along Route 110, the major local east-west
20 route connecting Merrimac to Haverhill and Amesbury. Businesses include home and
21 auto service providers and small professional offices, while the area lacks restaurants
22 and traditional retail. Merrimac has a small light manufacturing base, notably including
23 the sheet metal company J.F. Mullen located in Merrimac's industrial zoning district on
24 Route 110.

25 26 *Open Space and Farmland*

27 While commercial agriculture is no longer a mainstay of Merrimac's economy, some
28 farmland has been preserved using Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APRs), where
29 significant agricultural lands are permanently protected from development in exchange
30 for monetary compensation from the state. There are two APRs in Merrimac on portions
31 of Sargent Farm and a 68-acre property on Birch Meadow Road. Most of the nearly 360
32 acres of the Sargent Farm property are permanently protected, but significant portions of
33 potentially developable residential land remain.

34
35 Chapter 61 is a state program that offers tax relief to property owners in exchange for
36 preserving open space for agriculture, forestry, or outdoor recreation. Unlike many other
37 protections, Chapter 61 is not permanent and property owners may opt to remove their
38 land from protection at any time, although the municipality does have the right of first
39 refusal to require land leaving the program. Notably, Sargent Farm recently came "out of
40 chapter," leaving portions of the property not covered by an APR potentially
41 developable.



1 Almost half of the protected open space in Merrimac is Town Forest, over 300 acres of
2 woodland with public trail access. While Town Forest lacks a formal conservation
3 restriction, it is classified as permanently protected land by the state because it is fully
4 under municipal ownership. Local efforts to place permanent legal protections on the
5 property are ongoing as of 2024. Other significant Town-owned open space includes
6 sites controlled by the Water Department as well as areas under the Conservation
7 Commission’s purview including the Perkins and Cobbler Brook Conservation Areas.
8 The Essex County Greenbelt land trust owns the Beaver Pond Reservation adjacent to
9 Merrimac’s Town Forest.

10
11 *Vacant Land*

12 Merrimac has over 1,000 acres of land classified as “vacant,” meaning that it has not been
13 developed or set aside for conservation purposes. Map X.X shows vacant land in gray,
14 classified as either developable or undevelopable by the Board of Assessors. Note that
15 land may be considered undevelopable due to factors such as local zoning regulations
16 that may be subject to change. Over 490 acres of this vacant land is considered
17 potentially developable, and is largely located in the eastern half of Town.

18
19 *Municipal Land*

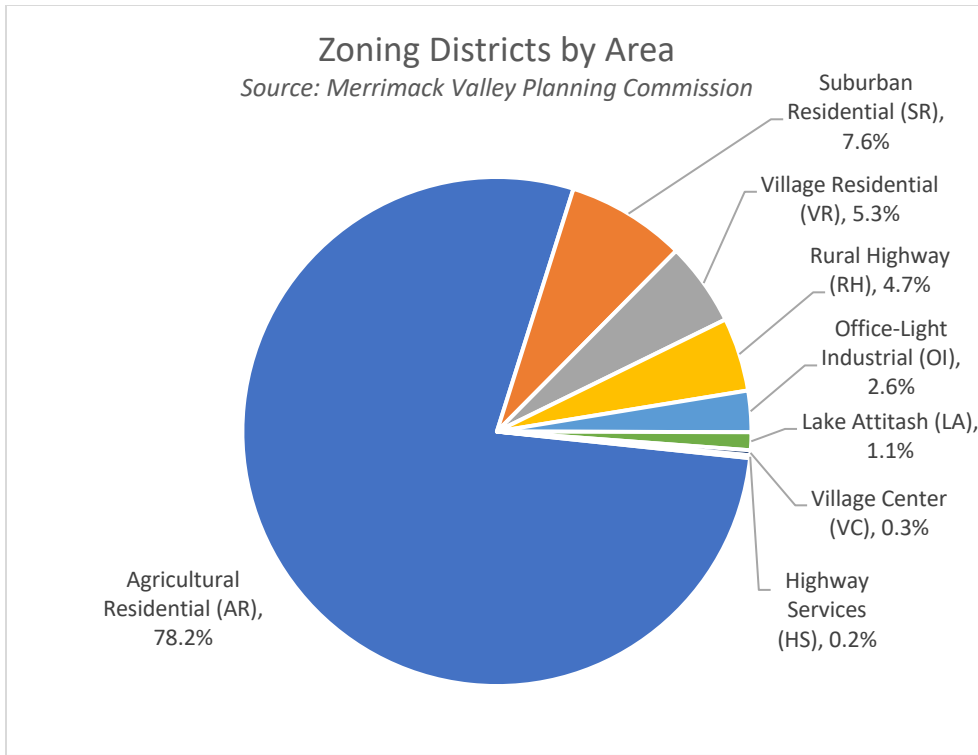
20 The Town of Merrimac owns over 650 acres of land, roughly 13 percent of the Town’s
21 land area. Around half of this is the Town Forest, and the remaining acres are divided
22 between vacant undeveloped land (discussed above) and properties seeing active
23 municipal use, including schools, cemeteries, and town wells.

24
25 **ZONING**

26 Merrimac’s zoning bylaw is the Town’s primary tool to regulate land use. All
27 municipalities in Massachusetts are divided into different zoning districts that determine
28 the types of uses that are allowed in each area and dimensional standards to regulate the
29 form and appearance of properties. All development in Merrimac must comply with
30 local zoning regulations, so understanding what is allowed under zoning indicates what
31 kind of land uses can be approved in the future.

32
33 Merrimac has eight zoning districts and four additional overlay districts. Figure X.X
34 shows each district by the amount of land area it covers, while Table X.X lists basic
35 dimensional regulations. Over 90 percent of the land in Merrimac is zoned for primarily
36 residential uses

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All zoning districts in Merrimac have a purpose statement that describes the desired character of each zone, a summary of which will be included as each district is discussed below. Each district also has its own set of design guidelines that developers must comply with if they are pursuing a special permit in that district. Design guidelines cover aspects development including site layout, building materials, and stormwater mitigation.



Table X.X: Summary of Merrimac Zoning Districts						
District Name (abbreviation)	Min. Lot Size (sq. ft.)	Max. Lot Coverage	Max. Building Height (feet)	Min. frontage (feet)	Min. Setbacks (feet) Front/side/rear	Min. Open Space
Village Residential (VR)	10,890	40%	35	80	10/10/10	*N/A
Suburban Residential (SR)	43,560 (1 acre)	20%	35	150	20/20/20	20%*
Agricultural Residential (AR)	87,120 (2 acres)	25%	35	200	50/30	25%*
Lake Attitash (LA)	7,500	50%	35	60	10/10/20	N/A
Village Center (VC)	10,500	No max.	45	50	No min.**	N/A
Rural Highway (RH)	80,000	40%***	40	200	None***/20/50	20%
Highway Services (HS)	20,000	80%	35	100	25/20/50	20%
Office-Light Industrial (OI)	60,000	80%	35 †	50	25/30/30	20%
Birch Meadow Overlay (BM)	20,000	30%	35	100	15/15/15	
<p><i>*In residential districts, developers are specifically required to preserve a certain portion of existing "wooded area." In other districts, open space area may be wooded or unwooded.</i></p> <p><i>**50-foot side setback when abutting a residential district</i></p> <p><i>*** Max. front setback of 40 feet</i></p> <p><i>†May be increased up to 55 feet by special permit</i></p> <p><i>Source: Merrimac Zoning Bylaw, revised 2020</i></p>						

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Residential Districts

Merrimac has three main residential districts that allow similar types of uses while differing in the relative level of density allowed. The districts are described below in order from highest to lowest residential density, as well as a fourth district specialized for Lake Attitash.

Village Residential (VR)

Purpose: to "preserve and enhance the established development pattern and traditional neighborhoods near Merrimac Square."

1 The VR district allows for the greatest density of any residential district (see Table X.X)
2 and is primarily located near Merrimac Square. The Town’s mobile home parks are also
3 zoned VR. This district allows a more diverse range of housing options than the other
4 residential districts. The zoning bylaw states that areas zoned VR have existing
5 infrastructure and services that can accommodate denser development. Duplexes are
6 allowed by right, and multifamily development is allowed via a special permit at a
7 density of 8 to 10 units per acre

8
9 The VR district also encourages infill residential development, a type of development
10 aimed at filling in gaps in an existing developed area. The Planning Board can waive
11 some dimensional regulations like the minimum frontage requirement to allow for 1 to 4
12 units of housing on a lot.

13
14 **Design standards** in the VR district are primarily meant to encourage the preservation of
15 existing historic structures and facades, and where preservation is not possible to have
16 the design of new structures match their surroundings.

17 18 [Suburban Residential \(SR\)](#)

19 *Purpose: to “recognize and reinforce the provision of established single-family neighborhoods near*
20 *schools, the Town center, Route 110 and other appropriate locations.”*

21
22 The SR District is comprised of three areas with substantial existing suburban
23 development, as well as the historic Merrimacport area (see Map X.X Zoning Districts).
24 Compared to the VR district, the SR district encourages homes on larger lots (at least one
25 acre) with larger front yards. Single-family homes are the primary type of development,
26 although homes in existence for at least ten years may be converted to a two-family
27 structure with a special permit. Accessory dwelling units may also be permitted in a
28 home that has existed for at least five years (see “Accessory Dwelling Units” below).

29
30 **Design standards** aim to protect vegetation and historic structures, limit stormwater
31 runoff, and provide some architectural guidelines.

32 33 [Agricultural Residential \(AR\)](#)

34 *Purpose: to “preserve the Town’s rural character and scenic landscapes, encourage farming,*
35 *provide for residential uses appropriate to a rural setting, and protect open space.”*

36
37 The AR district is Merrimac’s largest zoning district by far, covering nearly 80 percent of
38 the Town in low-density traditional agricultural areas. Most land in this district is
39 undisturbed open space, agricultural land, or single-family homes on large (at least two
40 acres) lots. The basic residential and agricultural uses allowed in the SR district are also
41 allowed here, with the addition of some more intensive agricultural activities like wood
42 lots and mills. There are some more specialized forms of residential allowed here as well:



1 areas near major rural roads allow small-scale cluster development (see “Rural
2 Agricultural Preservation Overlay District” Table X.X) and Open Space-Residential
3 Development and Assisted Living developments are allowed by special permit (see
4 “Other Zoning Regulations” below).

5

6 **Design standards** aim to protect historic structures and scenic views from the road by
7 minimizing new curb cuts, and ensure that new building designs match the area’s rural
8 character. A reduction of frontage requirements down to 50 feet may be allowed to help
9 preserve the character of scenic roads.

10

11 [Lake Attitash \(LA\)](#)

12 *Purpose: “to enable property owners to make minor alterations to their homes, and to foster new
13 and infill development... cognizant of the history of the district’s very small lot development
14 pattern.”*

15

16 The Lake Attitash District is designed to effectively regulate the dense community of
17 lake houses on the southern shore of Lake Attitash. Under any other residential zoning
18 district, most lots in this area would be rendered nonconforming and would require
19 property owners to seek variances from the Zoning Board of Appeals to make
20 substantial alterations. Adopting zoning that matches the historic development patterns
21 of this area has allowed the Town to more effectively regulate development activity.
22 Options like creating ADUs or multifamily conversions that increase the number of
23 dwelling units on a lot are not allowed in the LA district.

24

25 [Commercial & Industrial Districts](#)

26 [Village Center \(VC\)](#)

27 *Purpose: “...to preserve and enhance the historic built form of Merrimac Square, develop and
28 sustain a vital local economy... and provide a village that encourages people to live and work in
29 the community.”*

30

31 The VC district is designed to facilitate the flexible reuse and redevelopment of historic
32 properties in and around Merrimac Square. Dimensional standards are extremely
33 flexible to maintain the existing dense development patterns that predate the adoption of
34 modern zoning regulations. A mix of residential and commercial uses are allowed here,
35 including retail, professional and personal services, and hospitality uses. Mixed-use
36 development is allowed in the form of dwelling units above ground floor retail and live-
37 work spaces. These uses do not require a special permit in existing buildings of 2,500
38 gross square feet and below, while larger footprints require a special permit. Age-
39 restricted (55 plus) multifamily development may also be allowed by special permit at a
40 density of up to nine units per lot.

41

1 Because Merrimac Square has some public parking, the Planning Board may reduce
2 parking requirements or allow a contribution in lieu to the Merrimac Square Parking
3 Fund.

4
5 **Design Standards** promote the reuse of existing buildings rather over new construction
6 wherever possible, and ensure that any new construction is in line with the
7 neighborhood’s traditional character.

8
9 **Rural Highway (RH)**

10 *Purpose: “...to encourage Route 110 to develop in a manner consistent with the visual character*
11 *of the community, strengthen and stabilize the Town’s tax base, and foster a wide range of*
12 *commercial uses.”*

13
14 Rural Highway is the primary zoning district for the non-residential parts of Route 110,
15 to both the east and west of Merrimac Square. The RH district allows a wide range of
16 commercial uses by right in buildings of below 25,000 square feet, including: retail,
17 convenience stores, professional offices, restaurants, and grocery stores. Projects larger
18 than 25,000 square feet require a special permit. RH also allows multifamily housing for
19 adults aged 55 and up, and mixed commercial and residential development. Mixed-use
20 developments may take the form of separate multifamily and commercial buildings on
21 the same lot, or buildings with first-floor commercial and residential units above,
22 although the latter is “strongly preferred.” Mixed-use development must be comprised
23 of at least 40 percent commercial space and can have a residential density of up to six
24 units per acre.

25
26 **Design standards** aim to create a pedestrian-oriented commercial corridor and “enhance
27 visual character” by creating varied and visually interesting facades with varied heights
28 and massing.

29
30 **Highway Services (HS)**

31 *Purpose: to “manage traffic flows on Broad Street between I-495 and Route 110, provide goods*
32 *and services that serve local and nonlocal customers, enhance the Town’s tax base, [and] foster a*
33 *wide range of commercial uses.”*

34
35 The HS District is a small commercial area on Broad Street located just off of Route 495
36 exit 115. While the district has a few restaurants (Osaka Asian Bistro and a Dunkin’
37 location), much of the area is taken up by the Cobbler’s Brook Condominiums. The
38 district is designed to create a compact commercial service area for travelers on I-495 that
39 can host local businesses. Small-scale retail, offices, and hospitality uses are all allowed
40 by right, and restaurants and auto service establishments are allowed by special permit.



1 **Design standards** aim to create an attractive streetscape on Broad Street, with buildings
2 that are consistent with local character.

3

4 **Office-Light Industrial (OI)**

5 *Purpose: to "encourage high-quality industrial and office developments that make a positive*
6 *aesthetic and economic contribution to the community."*

7

8 The OI district is located between Routes 110 and 495 on the eastern side of town, and
9 serves as Merrimac's primary industrial district. The OI district allows more intensive
10 uses than the Town's commercial zones, including light manufacturing, research and
11 development facilities, and recycling centers. Some heavier industrial uses and
12 warehousing facilities can be allowed with a special permit. This district is also where
13 Merrimac allows adult uses and both medical and recreational marijuana establishments.

14

15 The OI district is the only zoning district in Merrimac that has a maximum floor area
16 ratio (FAR). This is a method of regulating density based on a ratio of the floor area of a
17 building to the total area of a lot. The maximum ratio of 1.5 in the OI district, for
18 example, means that the floor area of structures on any lot may add up to a maximum of
19 1.5 times the total area of that lot.

20

21 **Design standards** are concerned with creating accessible open space, adequate screening
22 and landscaping to protect views from Route 110, and regulating outdoor storage and
23 signs.

24

25 **Overlay Districts**

26 Overlay Districts are drawn on top of the underlying zoning districts, and the provisions
27 of the overlay apply in addition to those of the primary district. Merrimac has four
28 overlays, summarized in Table X.X: two focused on the protection of sensitive resource
29 areas and two on specialized residential development.

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Table X.X: Summary of Merrimac Overlay Districts

District Name	Purpose Statement (from zoning bylaw)	Description
Rural Agricultural Preservation Overlay District (RA)	<i>“[T]o encourage a development pattern that preserves established agricultural and forested landscapes along the Town’s rural roadways and protects the scenic beauty of the Town.”</i>	All areas zoned AR within 300 feet of roadway centerlines of Bear Hill Road, Brush Hill Road, Highland Road, Battis Road, Hadley Road, West Hadley Road, Birchmeadow Loop, and Heath Road. Allows the same uses as AR, plus Small-Area Cluster Development.
Floodplain District (FP)	<i>“[T]o protect public health, safety and general welfare; to protect human life and property from the hazards of periodic flooding; to preserve natural flood control characteristics and the flood storage capacity of the floodplain; and to preserve and maintain the groundwater table and water recharge areas within the floodplain”</i>	Zone A and E on the Essex County Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) issued by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Special permit from the ZBA required for enlarging a structure by more than 30% of the existing floor area, or for dumping, filling, and earth removal.
Water Resource Protection District (WRPD)	<i>“To limit development in watershed boundaries and recharge areas in order to protect public health by preventing the degradation or contamination of surface water and groundwater used for public water supply, to ensure an adequate quality and quantity of drinking water... and prevent temporary and permanent contamination of the environment.”</i>	Interim Wellhead Protection Areas, Zone I, Zone II and Zone III areas and Zone A, Zone B and Zone C surface water source watersheds, as defined by state regulations. Polluting activities like landfills or storage of hazardous materials prohibited. Any use that renders 15% of a lot requires a special permit and must provide adequate groundwater recharge. Establishes a 200-foot buffer zone along surface water sources.
Birch Meadow Overlay District (BM)	<i>“[T]o recognize the established smaller lot development pattern of parcels in the vicinity of West Main Street and Birch Meadow Road, to protect property values, and to provide regulatory flexibility, incentives and appropriate design standards for property improvements in the district.”</i>	Same basic residential uses allowed as in the SR district.

Source: Merrimac Zoning Bylaw, revised 2020



1 [Other Zoning Regulations](#)

2 [Site Plan Review](#)

3 Site Plan Review (SPR) is a way for municipalities to regulate and impose conditions on
4 uses that are nonetheless allowed by right- without the need for a discretionary special
5 permit. Merrimac’s bylaws call for the creation of a Site Plan Review Committee
6 composed of the entire Planning Board, plus the Building Inspector and a representative
7 from the Conservation Committee. This committee is charged with ensuring SPR
8 applications minimize impacts to adjacent properties and adequately address issues such
9 as on-site circulation and stormwater runoff. The committee also considers a zoning
10 district’s design guidelines in their review.

11

12 SPR is required for all new commercial and industrial development plus alterations to
13 existing structures creating an increase of 1,000 square feet or requiring ten additional
14 parking spaces. All uses in the VC district and all uses that require a special permit are
15 also subject to site plan review, although the zoning bylaw states that in these cases both
16 processes are handled concurrently at joint meetings of the relevant boards.

17

18 [Small-Area Cluster Development \(SACD\)](#)

19 SACD is allowed in the Rural Agricultural Preservation Overlay District (see above) and
20 is intended to provide more flexible subdivision guidelines to reduce development
21 impacts on important rural roadways. An SACD may consist of three to five single-
22 family dwellings (no more than what would otherwise be allowed through the
23 underlying zoning) where at least 50 percent of the site is preserved as open space. Open
24 space must be oriented towards the road and normal lot area and shape requirements
25 may be waived.

26

27 [Open Space Residential Development \(OSRD\)](#)

28 OSRD is an alternative to traditional subdivision development that provides more
29 flexibility in site design to maximize the protection of valuable natural features like
30 woodlands, wetlands, and agricultural areas. The zoning bylaw states that applicants are
31 “strongly encouraged” to choose OSRD rather than a conventional subdivision. An
32 OSRD allows for the same number of units that could be permitted by right, but relaxes
33 lot area, frontage, and setback requirements to make development more compact and
34 efficient. This preserves more land and has potential financial benefits to a developer.
35 Projects can only be proposed on a lot of 10 acres or larger, and can only consist of single-
36 family homes. An applicant can receive a density bonus for providing extra open space
37 or affordable housing, but only in an age-restricted development.

38

39 [Assisted Living and Elderly Housing](#)

40 Merrimac has several provisions allowing the creation of age-restricted residential
41 developments. Assisted Living developments provide personal services and care to
42 older adult residents while Elderly Housing refers to a multifamily development with

1 occupancy restricted to residents aged 55 or older. Assisted Living projects of up to 150
2 units are allowed by special permit in the AR and RH districts, and Elderly Housing
3 developments at densities of up to 6 units per acre are allowed by special permit in the
4 VR district.

5

6 [Accessory Dwelling Units \(ADU\)](#)

7 An ADU is a smaller, secondary dwelling that a homeowner may add to an existing
8 single-family home. Merrimac adopted new, more flexible ADU regulations in 2022. In
9 Merrimac, ADUs may be located fully within the existing building or as a separate
10 detached structure, and cannot exceed 900 square feet in area. In granting a special
11 permit, the Zoning Board of Appeals must determine that an ADU will not change the
12 exterior of the single-family home and that adequate parking and sewer access is
13 available. Only a relative of the homeowner may live in an ADU unless the unit is
14 designated for senior, disabled, or low-income residents.

15

16 [Single-Family Conversions](#)

17 In several residential districts, a property owner can apply for a special permit to convert
18 a single-family dwelling to a structure with two to four units. Only four of these projects
19 total can be approved per calendar year, and homes that have recently been significantly
20 expanded or do not meet minimum lot size requirements are not eligible. For projects
21 producing three or four units, at least one must be formally deed-restricted to be
22 affordable to low-income households.

23

24 [Re-Use of Municipal Building or Hazardous Material Site](#)

25 Merrimac's zoning bylaw allows for the reuse of municipal buildings and sites that are
26 contaminated with industrial hazards for multifamily housing. Projects must include at
27 least 25 percent of units that are income-restricted to be affordable to low-income
28 households, and in exchange the developer has the flexibility to request waivers from the
29 dimensional standards in the underlying zoning. The Planning Board may allow for a
30 residential density of up to 24 units per acre, the highest residential density allowed in
31 Merrimac.

32

33 [Parking](#)

34 Parking requirements impact land use decisions because they decrease the amount of land
35 available for structures and open space while increasing impervious surfaces. The land
36 required for parking can affect the feasibility of projects, especially larger ones that
37 would require many parking spaces. Two spaces per dwelling unit are required for most
38 residential uses, with the only exceptions being studio and one-bedroom units in
39 multifamily housing developments (1 and 1.5 spaces per unit, respectively) and units
40 that are restricted for occupancy by adults aged 55 or older (1.5 spaces per unit). Parking
41 requirements for commercial and industrial are based on the amount of gross floor area



1 in a building, from four spaces per 1,000 square feet for retail uses to one space per 1,000
2 square feet for industrial uses.

3

4 **Local Policies and Practices**

5 LOCAL CAPACITY

6 Special permit granting authority is split between the two main land use boards, the
7 Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals. Staff support for these boards is provided
8 by the Inspectional Services Department, comprised of the Building Commissioner and
9 an Administrative Coordinator. The Town also employs the services of a third-party
10 planning consultant to support local planning and land use activities.

11

12 *Planning Board (PB)*

13 Merrimac’s Planning Board is composed of five members and one associate member
14 appointed by the Board of Selectmen. The Board’s responsibilities include conducting
15 site plan review as a part of the Site Plan Review Committee and granting all special
16 permits not specifically delegated to the Zoning Board of Appeals. These include permits
17 for Open Space Residential Developments, age-restricted projects like Elderly Housing
18 and Assisted Living developments and both medical and recreational marijuana
19 establishments.

20

21 *Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA)*

22 Merrimac’s ZBA is made up of five regular members and four associate members
23 appointed by the Board of Selectmen. The Board’s main duties are to hear appeals of the
24 Building Commissioner’s decisions, grant variances from the zoning bylaw, issue
25 comprehensive permits (see Section 4.4 “Housing”), and grant certain special permits.
26 The ZBA is the special permit granting authority for extending or altering an existing use
27 or structure that does not conform with the zoning bylaw, activities in the WRPD and FP
28 overlay districts, and accessory dwelling units, among others.

29

30 *Building Commissioner*

31 The Building Commissioner is the Town official charged with enforcing and interpreting
32 the zoning bylaw. This includes issuing building permits, conducting on-site inspections,
33 and responding to potential violations. The Building Commissioner also enforces the
34 state Building Code and applicable provisions of Merrimac’s general bylaws.

35

36

4.2 Natural and Historic Resource Areas

Introduction

Merrimac has maintained the character and feel of the quintessential New England village, due to valuable natural landscapes and historic neighborhoods alike. A great deal of the town remains in its natural state, undeveloped due to local conservation efforts, natural constraints limiting land use, and landowners choosing to keep lands in agricultural uses.

Existing Conditions

GEOLOGY, TOPOGRAPHY, AND SOILS

Merrimac's topography is strikingly diverse, with a landscape and soil composition created by retreating glaciers thousands of years ago. The relative height of the drumlins (hills formed from the movement of ancient glaciers) provides scenic views and add to the natural hillsides and scenic beauty of the landscape, including Red Oak Hill the highest point in Town at 315 feet above sea level.¹

Retreating glaciers deposited alluvium and glacial tills, clays, silts, sands, and gravel over the bedrock. Soils in the eastern part of Town and around Brandy Brow Hill are deep well-draining sandy soils with very few limitations for development. However, this rapid permeability also means that groundwater is easily contaminated, so most of this area is sewered. Similarly, the deep well draining loamy soils and sandy tills in central Merrimac have been conducive to denser development. Very deep well-drained soils more suited for woodland and cropland are found along the western shores of Lake Attitash to the New Hampshire border and from Battis Road and Winter Street to the Merrimack River. Most of the current and historic farmland is found in this area.

While Northern Merrimac is characterized by working agricultural landscapes bordered by wetlands, hills, and forested areas, Southern Merrimac is characterized primarily by the Merrimack River. The river corridor is environmentally significant and aesthetically one of the Town's most important resources. The tributaries that feed the Merrimack River have cut valleys through the Town's steep hills, creating dramatic views and defining its visual identity.²

WATER RESOURCES

Watersheds and Surface Waters

Merrimac lies completely within the Merrimack River Watershed. The watershed provides drinking water for several municipalities in the Merrimack Valley. Permitting decisions by Town boards and commissions in each of the communities within the

¹ Town of Merrimac, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023, 18-19.

² Town of Merrimac, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023, 18.



1 watershed affect the drinking water and habitat of the people and wildlife in other
2 municipalities. Since Merrimac does not have the legal authority to regulate activities
3 throughout the watershed, the town's water resources are vulnerable to decisions made
4 in other municipalities.³

5
6 Among Merrimac's most important natural assets are its open water resources. Map X.X
7 displays these water resources along with the Town's wetlands and aquifers. Perhaps
8 the most critical water body in Town is the Merrimack River, which runs along the entire
9 southern edge of Town forming the boundary with West Newbury. Not only is the river
10 a crucial environmental, recreational, and aesthetic resource, but it has also played a
11 decisive role in the town's
12 history and that of the
13 greater Merrimack Valley.⁴

14
15 Extensive development has
16 occurred along the banks of
17 the river, and there is very
18 little buildable land left on
19 the riverfront. There is
20 limited public access to the
21 river in Merrimac however,
22 as most of the riverfront land
23 is privately owned. While
24 residents may access the
25 river at Carey Park and the
26 Locust St. landing for
27 passive recreation, the
28 closest public boat ramps are
29 in Amesbury and West

30 Newbury.⁵ While water quality in the river is generally good enough to support fishing
31 and recreation,⁶ it is threatened by pollution from combined sewer overflows and other
32 sources. As a result, portions of the Merrimack River, including the section running
33 through Merrimac, are classified under the Clean Water Act as Category 5, requiring
34 total maximum daily loads (TMDLs). The section in Town requires a TMDL due to
35 Enterococcus and Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in fish tissue.⁷

Total maximum daily load (TMDL): A TMDL establishes the maximum amount of a pollutant that a waterbody can receive and still attain water quality standards. The federal Clean Water Act requires all states to identify water bodies that do not meet state standards and develop TMDLs for them. Once MassDEP calculates the TMDL, communities decide through Comprehensive Wastewater Management Planning (CWMP) how best to implement the TMDL to achieve the desired water quality goals.

³ Town of Merrimac, 2016-2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan, 19.

⁴ Town of Merrimac, Master Plan, 2002, 2.20.

⁵ Town of Merrimac, 2016-2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan, 19.

⁶ The Massachusetts Division of Water Pollution and Control classifies Merrimac's section of the Merrimack River as "Class B", or water quality adequate to support fishing and recreation.

⁷ Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, *Final Massachusetts Integrated List of Waters for the*

Clean Water Act 2022 Reporting Cycle, 2023.

1
2 Merrimac’s secondary waterways include numerous perennial streams, brooks, and
3 ponds. The largest of these are the East Meadow River and Cobbler’s Brook, which run
4 into the Merrimack River, and the Back River, which runs into Lake Attitash. The
5 shoreline of Cobbler’s Brook is extensively developed with residential uses, light
6 manufacturing, agricultural uses, road crossings and culverts, the McLaren Trail, and the
7 former municipal landfill.⁸ Stormwater and road runoff threaten the water quality of the
8 brook, which is classified as a Category 5 impaired waterway due to debris ~~and trash~~,
9 dissolved oxygen, and warm temperatures.⁹ Smaller ponds are scattered throughout
10 town, including Neal Pond on the border with Haverhill and Sargent Millpond and
11 Crane Pond in the northeastern corner of Town (the remainder are mostly unnamed).

12
13 Lake Attitash is a 373-acre kettle hole pond located in the northeast part of Town. A
14 portion of the lake lies within the Town of Merrimac with the majority of the lake area
15 located across the town border in Amesbury. The lake provides scenic beauty and
16 recreational opportunities to residents and visitors. A public boat ramp with a parking
17 area, operated by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management (DEM),
18 provides access for both Merrimac residents and non-residents.¹⁰

19
20 Intensive shoreline development and extensive public use have contributed to declining
21 water quality at Lake Attitash. The lake has experienced frequent cyanobacteria blooms,
22 due to excessive phosphorus, and has a TMDL for harmful algal blooms.¹¹ Non-point
23 source pollutants, such as lawn and agricultural fertilizer and stormwater run-off, are the
24 likely causes of this excessive nutrient loading.¹² The Merrimac Board of Health also
25 monitors water quality in Lake Attitash to ensure the health and safety of swimmers.
26 During the summer, water samples are taken and tested for bacteriological quality and
27 the presence of E. coli.

28
29 Amesbury occupies more than 50 percent of the shoreline and relies on Lake Attitash as
30 a backup source of drinking water. Amesbury therefore manages Lake Attitash in
31 accordance with a Management Plan prepared by Camp Dresser and McKee (1999). To
32 maintain adequate drinking water supply and to control the water table, Amesbury
33 controls the height of the water in the Lake. The management plan also includes
34 provisions to control run-off and kill new plant growth.¹³

⁸ Town of Merrimac, 2016-2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan, 20.

⁹ Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, Final Massachusetts Integrated List of Waters for the Clean Water Act 2022 Reporting Cycle, 2023.

¹⁰ Town of Merrimac, 2016-2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan, 21.

¹¹ Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, Final Massachusetts Integrated List of Waters for the Clean Water Act 2022 Reporting Cycle, 2023.

¹² Town of Merrimac, 2016-2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan, 21.

¹³ Town of Merrimac, 2016-2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan, 21.



1 *Aquifers and Drinking Water*

2 Merrimac operates two groundwater supply wells that draw from underground aquifers
3 (see Map X.X). There are approximately 250 acres of medium and high yield aquifers in
4 the Town located at three sites: Bear Hill Road in northeast Merrimac, south of Lake
5 Attitash on East main Street, and Neal’s Pond on the Haverhill border.¹⁴

6
7 To protect the drinking water supply, Merrimac created a Water Resource Protection
8 District covering both groundwater resources (the area underneath the ground where
9 water is found) and surface water resources (the area of the aquifer contributing water to
10 wells under the most severe pumping and recharge conditions anticipated). The district
11 was developed because Merrimac and the city of Haverhill rely on Merrimac’s
12 groundwater resources for their drinking water supplies, and the town of Amesbury
13 relies on surface water from Merrimac (Lake Attitash) for its drinking water.¹⁵

14
15 *Flood Areas*

16 In Merrimac, 100-year flood zones extend along the entire Merrimack River riparian
17 corridor and the shoreline of Lake Attitash (Map X.X). Other large flood hazard areas
18 include the Cobbler’s Brook riparian corridor and the associated wetlands located to the
19 east of the corridor. Flooding is a recurring problem for residents living near these
20 waterways, exacerbated by vegetation and tree removal along the shoreline and
21 extensive impervious surfaces.

22
23 Merrimac established a Floodplain District that includes all areas established as zone A
24 or E on the Essex County Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) issued by FEMA for the
25 administration of the National Flood Insurance Program. The bylaw allows uses with
26 low flood-damage potential and requires a special permit for all other uses allowed in
27 the underlying zoning district.

28
29 *Wetlands*

30 Wetlands are an important component of the hydrologic system. They play a critical role
31 in water storage and flood control, and many species of wildlife depend on wetland
32 habitat. Wetlands also protect water quality and function as groundwater recharge and
33 discharge areas. Nearly 10 percent (5,070 acres) of Merrimac’s total land area is wetlands.
34 Many wetland areas abut the Town’s rivers and ponds. Other significant wetlands
35 include the area south of Lake Attitash near the Town’s well field and to the west of Bear
36 Hill Road. The large wetland between Red Oak Hill and Long Hill is the source of a
37 tributary to Cobbler’s Brook and Silver Stream. Merrimac’s wetlands are comprised of
38 shrub swamp, newly formed beaver pond, shallow marsh, and deciduous wooded
39 swamp.¹⁶

¹⁴ Town of Merrimac, 2016-2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan, 22.

¹⁵ Town of Merrimac, 2016-2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan, 22.

¹⁶ Town of Merrimac, 2016-2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan, 23.

1
2 The Town’s wetlands are protected by both the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act
3 and the local Wetlands Bylaw. The purpose of the local wetland bylaw is to protect the
4 Town’s wetlands and related water resources by creating a 50-foot no disturbance zone
5 and a 100-foot buffer zone around these significant resource areas. The Conservation
6 Commission has jurisdiction to regulate development activity within these areas.¹⁷
7

8 *Vegetation and Habitats*

9 Merrimac is part of the southeastern hardwood (or mixed deciduous) forest. Upland
10 forests are predominantly hardwood – northern red oak, shagbark hickory, beech, red
11 maple, and birch – with small stands of softwood hemlock and white pine. Red and
12 silver maple, speckled alder, white oaks, pin oaks, hemlock, sweet pepperbush, and
13 highbush blueberry are common in swampy, wet areas.
14

15 Forests in Merrimac include the 331-acre Merrimac Town Forest, located in the heart of
16 the Town. The Town Forest is not permanently protected, although no logging is
17 currently allowed there or in other Town owned forest lands like the Perkins
18 Conservation Area. North-central Merrimac’s forests, farmland, and pastures are
19 particularly important areas of species diversity. These forest, fields, and roadsides
20 provide habitat for a range of wild plants. The wetlands surrounding the lakes, ponds,
21 and streams in Merrimac are mainly red maple swamp and include species such as
22 bellflowers, cattails, Joe Pye weed, pickerel weed and spiderworts. The invasive purple
23 loosestrife and phragmites are also found in some wetlands. Invasive species are
24 frequently ornamental and are non-native and can invade, degrade, and destroy the
25 habitat of local species.
26

27 The Massachusetts Natural Heritage Program has documented only one threatened
28 plant species in Merrimac: American Bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*). The most recent
29 recorded observation of this vascular plant in Merrimac was in 1951.¹⁸ Approximately
30 60% of all land in Merrimac is considered part of an ecologically significant habitat. The
31 Town owns several large, connected tracts of this habitat land, including the Town
32 Forest and the Perkins Conservation Area.
33

34 There are three important wildlife corridors that allow species to move through and
35 within Merrimac. The first is the riparian corridor along the Merrimack River. The
36 second is a swath of open space comprising forest and farmland (meadows and
37 grasslands) west of McLaren Trail in Town Forest, where species can travel north to New
38 Hampshire. The third corridor is anchored by the McLaren Trail and expands eastward
39 to Lake Attitash, encompassing the Cobbler’s Brook riparian corridor.¹⁹ The culverts

¹⁷ Town of Merrimac, 2016-2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan, 23.

¹⁸ Town of Merrimac, 2016-2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan, 24.

¹⁹ Town of Merrimac, 2016-2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan, 24.



1 along I-495 however, are not large enough to connect wildlife habitat in northern
2 Merrimac to the Merrimack River.²⁰ Additionally, there are three certified vernal pools
3 and 29 potential vernal pools identified in Merrimac. Vernal pools provide critical
4 habitat for many amphibian and invertebrate species relying on breeding habitats free of
5 fish predators.²¹

6

7 *Fisheries and Wildlife*

8 Common animal species in northeastern Massachusetts rely on Merrimac’s forests,
9 fields, vernal pools, and wetlands. Bats, beavers, chipmunks, fishers, mice, minks,
10 muskrats, otters, porcupine, raccoons, shrews, gray squirrels, voles, weasels, and
11 woodchucks inhabit many of Merrimac’s forests. Fox and white-tailed deer are also quite
12 common. Residents occasionally report sighting bears, bobcats, coyotes and moose.²²

13

14 The diversity of Merrimac’s landscape provides habitats for breeding, feeding, nesting,
15 and refueling. Undisturbed hardwood forests are essential to the survival of bird species,
16 and songbirds inhabit the Town’s grassland and forests. Merrimac’s freshwater bodies
17 provide a habitat for fish, amphibians, and birds. Bluegill, chain pickerel, largemouth
18 bass, pumpkinseed, white perch, and yellow perch all live in Lake Attitash. The
19 Merrimack River is home to Alewife, American eel, Atlantic Salmon, Atlantic shad,
20 Atlantic sturgeon, blueback herring, gizzard shad, sea lamprey and striped bass.

21

22 Riparian corridors shelter the bald eagle and protect the water supply for aquatic birds
23 and Merrimac’s many fish. Amphibious species including frogs and salamanders, as well
24 as snakes and turtles, use the Town’s ponds and wetlands, as do cormorants, cranes,
25 ducks, geese, herons, and ospreys. Riparian wetlands and vernal pools provide habitat
26 for the Blanding’s Turtle, the Blue Spotted Salamander, the Eastern Box Turtle, and
27 Spotted Turtle.²³ Table 4.2.1 displays six species the Massachusetts Natural Heritage
28 Program has documented as endangered, threatened, or of special concern in Merrimac.

29

30

31

32

²⁰ Town of Merrimac, 2016-2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan, 24-5.

²¹ Town of Merrimac, 2016-2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan, 24.

²² Town of Merrimac, 2016-2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan, 24-5.

²³ Town of Merrimac, 2016-2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan, 24-5.

Taxonomic Group	Common Name	Scientific Name	MESA* Status	Most Recent Obs.
Bird	Bald Eagle	Haliaeetus leucocephalus	Threatened	2020
Fish	Shortnose Sturgeon	Acipenser brevirostrum	Endangered	2016
Amphibian	Blue-spotted Salamander (complex)	Ambystoma laterale pop. 1	Special Concern	2000
Reptile	Blanding's Turtle	Emydoidea blandingii	Threatened	2012
	Eastern Box Turtle	Terrapene carolina	Special Concern	1998
Beetle	Purple Tiger Beetle	Cicindela purpurea	Special Concern	Historic

**Massachusetts Endangered Species Act*
Source: MassWildlife's Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program, Rare Species Viewer, 2023.

1

2 *Scenic and Unique Resources*

3 Many of Merrimac’s roads retain a rural character with narrow paving, winding routes,
 4 and scenic vistas (particularly in northern Merrimac). River Road however, is the only
 5 road designated as a Scenic Road by Town Meeting. The Mother’s Day storm of 2006
 6 washed out a half-mile stretch of River Road, and in recent years a change in frequency
 7 and severity of storms has further compromised the road. The damaged road is now
 8 closed to all auto, bicycle and pedestrian traffic, and the Town lacks the federal funds to
 9 make adequate repairs despite local .²⁴

10

11 For local roads designated under the Massachusetts Scenic Road Act (M.G.L.c.40 SS
 12 15C), the Planning Board can limit the removal of any trees and stone walls located
 13 within the public way. The Board has no jurisdiction over tree or stone wall removal on
 14 undesignated roads.

15 **CULTURAL RESOURCES**

16 From the early 19th-century homes of Merrimacport, to the Victorian-style commercial
 17 structures in Merrimac Square, to the agricultural landscapes of northern Merrimac, the
 18 town has a wealth of historic resources spanning more than 200 years reinforcing its
 19 unique cultural identity.²⁵

²⁴ Town of Merrimac, 2016-2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan, 25.

²⁵ Town of Merrimac, Master Plan, 2002.



1
2 Despite this, there are currently no formal public measures in place to identify and
3 protect the Town’s historic and cultural resources. Merrimac has no buildings that have
4 been added to the state or National Register of Historic Places, has not designated any
5 local historic districts pursuant to M.G.L. c 40C, and has no demolition delay bylaw.
6 Instead, the Town has largely relied on voluntary private efforts to preserve historic
7 buildings and resources in Merrimac. Recently, the Merrimac Historical Commission has
8 begun work to identify suitable historic properties to be added to the state and national
9 databases.

10 *Historic Areas*

11 Merrimacport and Merrimac Square are the oldest parts of Town, and as a result, most of
12 the historic buildings in Merrimac are found in these areas. During the industrial
13 revolution, Southern Merrimac was an important seat of the horse-carriage industry;
14 there were at least 19 carriage shops in Merrimac Square and Merrimacport. The Town
15 had a national reputation for producing fine coaches, broughams and victorias. At one
16 point, the industry employed nearly 50 percent of the Town. These villages retain
17 excellent examples of colonial and Victorian structures built during this era of
18 prosperity.²⁶

20 *Merrimacport*

21 Originally settled in the early 18th century, Merrimacport, located on the Merrimack
22 River, is an exceptionally well-preserved village of Georgian, Federal, Greek revival, and
23 early Victorian-style buildings. Although none of the buildings have been formally
24 designated as historic properties or protected, many have been inventoried by the
25 Massachusetts Historical Commission on the Massachusetts Cultural Resource
26 Information System (MACRIS). There are 61 inventoried properties in the Merrimacport
27 area (this is not a definitive list of all the historic properties in the area, however). These
28 properties have been documented on the MACRIS database due to historical
29 significance, whether that be architectural, commercial, archeological, or industrial.
30 While most are single-family residences, others have had alternative uses as commercial,
31 industrial, agricultural, and religious spaces.

33 *Merrimac Square*

34 Merrimac Square is located at the junction of Route 110, School Street and Church Street.
35 Merrimac Center (which includes Merrimac Square) developed in response to the
36 burgeoning horse carriage industry flourishing in the latter half of the 19th century. The
37 grand Victorian-style homes along West Main Street, with their extensive architectural

²⁶ Town of Merrimac, 2016-2023 *Open Space and Recreation Plan*.

1 embellishment, were built for owners and managers of the numerous carriage shops,
2 and they attest to the affluence that this industry brought into Merrimac.²⁷
3

4 **Local Policies and Practices**

5 Thoughtful planning and careful management have helped Merrimac to preserve,
6 expand, and maintain the Town Forest and other open spaces (see Section 4.3 Open
7 Space and Recreation). Merrimac’s local planning documents and bylaws prioritize
8 linkages and the protection of critical natural and cultural resources. Local wetlands and
9 zoning bylaws give the Town regulatory tools to protect sensitive resources and preserve
10 open space.
11

12 **PAST PLANNING EFFORTS**

13 *Master Plan (2002)*

14 Merrimac’s last master plan, completed in 2002, included specific goals and objectives
15 related to protection and preservation of natural and cultural resources in Town. These
16 goals focused on treating Merrimac’s natural resources, historic architecture, and
17 landmarks as irreplaceable public assets. The goals aim to assure that new development
18 respects the topography and character of the land. The goals also include retaining and
19 enhancing Merrimac Square as the Town’s social, economic, civic, and governmental
20 center. Additionally, they aim to support and promote cultural activities for the
21 education, entertainment, and general benefit of Merrimac residents.
22

23 *Open Space and Recreation Plan (2016-2023)*

24 More recently, Merrimac updated the Town’s 2005-2010 Open Space and Recreation
25 Plan. The new 2016-2023 plan identifies opportunities to preserve land protecting
26 wildlife habitat and greenway corridors, safeguard water resources for drinking water,
27 habitat, and recreation. Additional opportunities include supporting the continuity and
28 vitality of agriculture in Merrimac, and engaging Town departments and residents in
29 implementing the plan. Identified opportunities also include the stewardship of
30 Merrimac’s natural resources, historic landscapes, and landmarks.

31 **BOARDS, COMMITTEES, AND COMMISSIONS**

32 *Conservation Commission*

33 The Conservation Commission, formed by volunteers appointed by the Select Board, is
34 entrusted with the stewardship of environmentally sensitive land in Merrimac,
35 particularly wetlands. Their responsibilities extend to overseeing regulations and
36 development in these areas. While actively involved in permit management for
37 alterations in sensitive wetland zones, they work closely with the OSC and Town

²⁷ Town of Merrimac, 2016-2023 *Open Space and Recreation Plan*, 25-6.



1 officials. Their collaborative efforts are dedicated to securing and conserving open
2 spaces, recreation trails, and ecologically fragile areas.

3

4 *Lake Attitash Association (LAA)*

5 The Lake Attitash Association is a non-profit organization managed by volunteers. The
6 LAA was formed in 1993 to develop and encourage activities, improvements, and
7 responsible behavior on Lake Attitash and in its watershed, and to maintain the quality
8 of the lake.²⁸

9

10 *Merrimac Cultural Council*

11 The Merrimac Cultural Council supports community-based Arts, Humanities, and
12 Interpretive Science events with funding allocated by the Massachusetts Cultural
13 Council.

14

15 *Merrimac Historical Commission (MHC)*

16 The Merrimac Historical Commission (MHC) is a town committee that documents,
17 records, and preserves Merrimac’s history. By encouraging renovation and adaptive reuse
18 as alternatives to demolition of historic properties, the MHC works to ensure that growth
19 and development can coincide with the protection of the historical assets of the town.²⁹

20 *Open Space Committee*

21 The Open Space Committee’s mission is to identify and help to preserve open space,
22 recreational and trail opportunities in Merrimac This all-volunteer committee is also
23 charged with implementing recommendations of the Town’s Open Space and Recreation
24 Plan.

25

26

27

28

²⁸ Lake Attitash Association, “About the Lake Attitash Association,” <https://lakeattitash.org/#>, accessed November 29, 2023.

²⁹ Town of Merrimac, “Historical Commission,” <https://townofmerrimac.com/historical-commission/>, accessed January 3, 2024.

4.3 Open Space and Recreation

Introduction

When colonists first settled in the Merrimack Valley, the region was cleared along river corridors to make way for agriculture and husbandry land serving as the foundations for economic life. Most of this land has now evolved into the post-agricultural southern New England hardwood forest and is the foundational landscape for open space and recreation within the town.³⁰

Merrimac's natural environment is a cornerstone of its identity. There are many scenic areas and natural resources the town has access to. The Merrimack River, Town Forest, and Perkins Conservation Area are three of the most prominent examples. Merrimac will continue to protect and preserve its natural landscape, as well as resume work on projects developing, supporting, and maintaining town resources and landmarks.

Existing Conditions

The Massachusetts Department of Revenue defines open space as "land not held for the production of income but is maintained in an open or natural condition that contributes significantly to the benefit and enjoyment of the public."³¹ The aesthetic beauty and utilized recreational areas have become major attractions for residents and visitors.

OPEN SPACE FEATURES

As of October 2023, Merrimac has almost 1,100 acres of open space, with the Town owning approximately 56 percent (616 acres).³² The Town's most significant open space holdings are the Town Forest, Perkins Conservation Area, Cobbler's Brook Greenway, and Jay McLaren Trail.³³ Since the acquisition of Emery Street Field by the Town in 1996, it has been underutilized as an open field. The Open Space Committee (OSC) believes the Emery Street Field is a suitable space to develop accessible community gardens and other recreational facilities to foster a sense of community in Merrimac.³⁴

Open Space Conservation and Protection

A significant portion of Merrimac's open space is permanently protected. Land attains perpetual protection when it is owned by the town's conservation commission or water department, a state conservation agency, a non-profit land trust, or is subject to a

³⁰ Massachusetts Historical Commission. *Reconnaissance Survey Town Report: Merrimac*, 5.

³¹ Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services. *Property Type Classification Codes*, 2016.

³² MassGIS. "Protected Open Space and Recreation," Updated in July 2023.

³³ MassGIS. "Protected Open Space and Recreation," Updated in July 2023.

³⁴ Merrimac Open Space Committee. *Annual Report 2022*.



1 conservation restriction with federal/state assistance.³⁵ The majority of open space and
2 recreation areas are Town-owned, with ongoing efforts by officials to secure additional
3 parcels through Town funding and potential implementation of the Community
4 Preservation Act (CPA). Despite an unsuccessful town vote in 2001 to implement the
5 CPA into funding, it remains a strategic tool for smart growth, enabling communities to
6 conserve open space, preserve historic sites, facilitate affordable housing, and develop
7 outdoor recreational facilities. This act, funded by a percentage of residents' taxes, could
8 significantly bolster future funding for open space maintenance and acquisition.³⁶ Recent
9 additions to the town's open space inventory include parcels located in the Town Forest
10 facilitated by the OSC. **There have been ongoing local efforts to secure permanent
11 protection for the Town Forest through approval under Article 97 of the Massachusetts
12 Constitution Amendments.** This article establishes the citizens' right to a clean
13 environment, encompassing natural, scenic, historical, and aesthetic qualities. If the
14 parcel is taken for conservation purposes, it is permanently protected for that purpose
15 unless the General Court votes by a 2/3 margin of each house to remove such
16 protection.³⁷

17
18 The OSC and Conservation Commission are groups dedicated to preserving and
19 maintaining specific areas of open space. These include key access points to existing
20 open spaces and trails such as Smith Farm on Highland Road, Hoyt Farm on Birch
21 Meadow Road, Tamarack Farm on Locust Street, Town Improvement Society Land,
22 Sargent Farmland, the warehouse property on Bear Hill Road, and Sunday Farm on
23 Birchmeadow Street.³⁸

24
25 Indian Head Park, once a town parcel with public use, has unfortunately lost its
26 accessibility and is unlikely to reopen. The challenge stems from the absence of public
27 access beyond the town's control, leading to the closure of a previously available public
28 beach on the property. The surrounding private ownership has made it impossible to
29 reach the beach, contributing to the termination of its public use.

30
31 There are no Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) in Merrimac, but the
32 Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) has
33 identified the Merrimack River riparian corridor as a Bio Map Core Habitat area. This
34 means that the area is critical for endangered and threatened species needing protection,
35 and it corresponds with the largely unbroken open space corridors in Merrimac. NHESP
36 describes this area as significant because it buffers and connects Bio Map Core Habitats,

³⁵ MassGIS. "Protected Open Space and Recreation," Updated July 2023.

³⁶ Community Preservation Coalition. About. <https://www.communitypreservation.org/about>

³⁷ MassGov. Article 97: The-Public-Lands-Preservation-Act. <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/article-97-the-public-lands-preservation-act>

³⁸ Merrimac Open Space Committee. Annual Report 2022.

1 and is comprised of large, naturally vegetated areas relatively free from the impact of
2 roads and other development.³⁹

3
4 Merrimac shares many natural resources with its neighbors, such as the 180-mile-long
5 Merrimack River, its watershed, and Lake Attitash. These water bodies have supported
6 Water resources that have been crucial in sustaining both residential livelihoods and
7 economic activities essential for the town's development since its separation from
8 Amesbury in 1876.⁴⁰ These water bodies also contribute to the town's scenic beauty and
9 recreational appeal, providing opportunities for outdoor activities such as fishing,
10 boating, and other water-based recreation, enhancing the overall quality of life for
11 residents.

13 *Chapter 61 Land and Agricultural Preservation*

14 The Chapter 61 Forest Tax Program offers special tax benefits to landowners who keep
15 their land as open space for timber production, agriculture, or recreation. Landowners
16 have the option to withdraw their land from the program at any time. In such cases, the
17 town has the right of first refusal, meaning it gets the opportunity to purchase the land at
18 a mutually agreeable price between the current owner and the Town.⁴¹ Currently there
19 are 93.1 acres temporarily protected in the Chapter 61 program for agriculture use. The
20 largest holding (26 acres) is located on Hadley Road.⁴² Notably, all the land enrolled in
21 the Chapter 61 program is agricultural (61A) with none set aside for forestry or
22 recreational use.

23
24 The agricultural acreage in Merrimac has experienced a decline in recent years
25 influenced by regional market forces.⁴³ To support farmers in retaining their land, the
26 Town employs the Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program (APR). Through this
27 program, farmland owners are offered compensation equal to the difference between the
28 fair market value and the agricultural value of their farmland in exchange for a
29 permanent deed restriction protecting the farmland for future agricultural use.⁴⁴ The
30 total land under APR amounts to 297.8 acres, including portions of Sargent Farm on Bear
31 Hill Road, and a farm located on the west side of town on Birch Meadow Road and
32 abutting the Town Forest.⁴⁵

³⁹ Merrimac Open Space Committee. Open Space and Recreation Plan 2016-2023, 27.

⁴⁰ Massachusetts Historical Commission. Reconnaissance Survey Town Report: Merrimac, 11.

⁴¹ MassGov. Forest Tax Program Chapter 61. <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/forest-tax-program-chapter-61>

⁴² Patriot Properties. Merrimac Assessor Data. <https://merrimac.patriotproperties.com/default.asp>

⁴³ Town of Merrimac, 2001 Master Plan, 2001, 2.1.

⁴⁴ MassGov. Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program. <https://www.mass.gov/agricultural-preservation-restriction-apr-program>

⁴⁵ MassGIS. "Protected Open Space and Recreation" Updated in July 2023.



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Water Bodies

Lake Attitash and the Merrimack River are the town's primary water bodies used for recreation. The shores of Lake Attitash and the banks of the Merrimack River often serve as community gathering spaces. A limited number of events, festivals, and recreational activities are organized around these water bodies, although the Open Space Committee aspires to expand these programs to strengthen community bonds and provide residents with spaces for social interaction. Merrimac also has with numerous smaller streams and brooks, enhancing its aesthetic appeal while simultaneously playing vital roles in fostering biodiversity, controlling flooding, and improving water quality for the town.

Lake Attitash is in the Powwow River sub-watershed. Before the Powwow River was dammed, Lake Attitash drained through present-day Market Square in Amesbury. The Powwow River dam supplied water for mills located near the rapids around Market Square. When hydroelectric power stations were no longer needed to fuel the mills, people began building summer cottages along the banks of Lake Attitash in Merrimac and Amesbury. Year-round homes have since replaced these properties, while vacant sites have been transformed into residential developments, leading to moderate to high density of housing along the shoreline.⁴⁶ Access to Lake Attitash is limited because most waterfront land is privately owned, including one private marina. There is one boat launch open to the public owned by the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game. The Merrimack riverfront is also largely privately owned, meaning no public boat access in Merrimac. The nearest boat ramps accessible to the public along the river are situated in Amesbury and West Newbury.⁴⁷

WALKABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Sidewalks and trails are maintained across Merrimac, as shown in Map X.X. Sidewalks are more common and better maintained in the most populated areas of the town with more foot traffic. Enhanced signage and meticulously crafted maps can now be found at Town Forest and McLaren Trail entrances and areas bordering the Merrimack River. The purpose of this new wayfinding is to promote public engagement and facilitate smooth navigation along the trails, enabling visitors to fully appreciate the natural landscape nurtured by Merrimac.⁴⁸

In 2021, the Institute for Human-Centered Design (IHCD) conducted a comprehensive assessment of ADA accessibility and walkability pertaining to open spaces and recreational areas around Merrimac. Areas included in the report include Stevens Field, Town Forest Soccer Fields, and several other recreational parcels. The report highlights the need for increased accessibility options and improved maintenance of trails,

⁴⁶ Merrimac Open Space Committee. Open Space and Recreation Plan 2016-2023, 19.
⁴⁷ Merrimac Open Space Committee. Open Space and Recreation Plan 2016-2023, 24.
⁴⁸ Merrimac Open Space Committee. Open Space and Recreation Plan Progress Report, June 2023

1 sidewalks, fields, and playgrounds across Merrimac. Over time, the Town will need to
2 reassess its compliance with program accessibility, and it may become necessary to
3 acquire new accessible equipment or make structural modifications.⁴⁹

4

5 TRAILS

6 Merrimac has about 130 miles of trails, which are managed and maintained by the
7 Volunteer Trails Committee. The resilience of this trail system hinges on the continuous
8 recruitment and retention of volunteers, coupled with essential elements such as,
9 equipment provision and effective coordination. Some trails and sensitive habitat areas
10 have been damaged by motorized vehicle use or other disturbing activities.⁵⁰

11

12 Merrimac's most expansive trail network is in the Town Forest stretching through 311
13 acres of land. For a comprehensive overview of trails extending through Merrimac,
14 please refer to Table 4.3.1. Additionally, Map 4.3.1 visually illustrates all open space
15 parcels, their levels of protection, and the trails offered by Merrimac. The Town Forest
16 stands out with the highest amount of dedicated land for trail usage and open space in
17 perpetuity.

18

DRAFT

⁴⁹ Institute for Human Centered Design. Town of Merrimac ADA Transition Plan 2021, 3.

⁵⁰ Merrimac Open Space Committee. Open Space and Recreation Plan 2016-2023, 28.



Trail Name	Description	Owner
Town Forest Trails	311-acre tract of land that lies in the Cobbler Brook watershed. There are several trails in the Town Forest: Red Oak Trail, Town Forest Trail, Long Hill Trail, Valley Trail, Cobbler's Brook Trail, and the Currier Trail.	Town of Merrimac
McLaren Trail	2-mile recreational trail encompassing 45 acres. It is the old West Amesbury Branch Railroad bed	Town of Merrimac
Marshview and Innis Trail	2 half-mile trails that connect to McLaren Trail. Includes farm fields and runs alongside a wetland. The Innis Trail connects the Marshview Trail with Brush Hill Road.	Town of Merrimac
Beaver Pond Reservation Trail	39-acre reservation that abuts the Merrimac Town Forest	Essex County Greenbelt Association
Cobbler's Brook Greenway	20 acres of conservation land off of Broad Street	Town of Merrimac

Source: Merrimac Open Space Committee. Merrimac Trail Info and Maps, 2023 (with corrections from OSC members). <https://sites.google.com/view/merrimac-open-space-committee/merrimac-trail-info-and-maps>.

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RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

There is currently no Recreation Department in Merrimac due to the town’s limited capacity. The Department of Public Works (DPW) currently maintains the recreational areas around town. They maintain areas including Emory Street Fields and Stevens Athletic Fields. Private sports leagues using the town’s playing fields assist with facility upgrades, cleaning, and general maintenance. Each sports league is governed by its own Board of Directors, which manages league play and takes responsibility for fundraising. The Pentucket Regional School District maintains recreation facilities on school property.⁵¹

There has been recent interest in changing an underutilized field on Emery Street into a community gathering place. According to a recent town-wide survey open to residents, a majority of respondents (about 55 percent) want the property to transform into a playground, while accessible walking trails and a dog park were popular choices below the 50 percent threshold.⁵² Table 4.32.2 displays Merrimac’s current recreational facilities open to the public, with Carriage Town Park being the largest recreational parcel in town.

⁵¹ Merrimac Open Space Committee. Open Space and Recreation Plan 2016-2023, 27.

⁵² Merrimac Open Space Committee. Emery Street Property Survey, March 2023.

Name	Property Facilities	Estimated Acres
Town Forest	4 soccer fields	15.0
Emory Street Field	Walking track and undeveloped	17.9
Carey Park	Picnicking & river viewing	1.2
Locust Street Landing	Potential canoe and kayak launch (pending Select Board approval)	1.2
Stevens Athletic Fields (at Donahue School Grounds)	1 Tennis court, 1 Baseball field, 1 softball field, and old swings/slide	14.0
Donahue School	Basketball court	
Sweetsir School	Playground	12.0

Source: Merrimac Open Space Committee. Open Space and Recreation Plan 2016-2023, 27. With edits and corrections from OSC members.

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Local Policies and Practices

Merrimac has several guidelines, volunteers, and working groups committed to environmental management concerning the utilization of open space and recreation. The local practices and policies in the town and region delineate the local and regional entities engaged in decision-making, maintenance, education, and funding for open space and recreation initiatives.

CONSERVATION COMMISSION

The Conservation Commission, consisting of volunteers appointed by the Select Board, is entrusted with the stewardship of environmentally sensitive land in Merrimac, particularly wetlands. Their responsibilities extend to overseeing regulations and development in these areas. The Commission holds ownership of various open space parcels throughout Merrimac, including Cobbler’s Brook Greenway, McLaren Trail, and Duck Hole Landing. While actively involved in permit management for alterations in sensitive wetland zones, they work closely with the OSC and Town officials. Their collaborative efforts are dedicated to securing and conserving open spaces, recreation trails, and ecologically fragile areas.



1 OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE

2 The Open Space Committee (OSC) consists of seven volunteers appointed by the Select
3 Board in two-year staggered terms. The OSC actively identifies and preserves open
4 space, recreation, and trail opportunities. It raises public awareness about these
5 opportunities and helps individuals utilize various amenities such as organized sports,
6 hiking, biking, walking, birding, and horseback riding. In the Spring of 2023, the OSC
7 sponsored an ecologist-led walk on the McLaren and Marshview Trails, followed by
8 another walk focusing on flora and fauna in the Fall of 2023. Recently the committee
9 conducted a trail maintenance day for major trails in the Town Forest, re-blazing trails
10 using paint to minimize plastic and harm to the trees and installing new trail signs. New
11 maps reflecting the updated trail system have been requested from MVPC.

12
13 Furthermore, the OSC expands land conservation efforts, exemplified by the protection
14 of the Town Forest through a combination of grant funding, OSC and DPW budget
15 allocations, and Town Meeting appropriations. In addition to preserving natural spaces,
16 the OSC educates Merrimac residents about open space and tax incentives associated
17 with land donation for conservation restrictions through Essex County Greenbelt.⁵³

18
19 Despite these initiatives, the OSC faces a challenge in advancing a project to add a kayak
20 and canoe launch for town river access. Unfortunately, the project is currently on hold
21 due to insufficient parking space. Nevertheless, the OSC continues to play a pivotal role
22 in the comprehensive management of land acquisition for open space and recreation.
23 Serving as a central information hub within the town, they facilitate and oversee
24 endeavors aimed at enhancing open space and recreational opportunities for the
25 community.

26
27 LAKE ATTITASH ASSOCIATION

28 Established in 1993, the Lake Attitash Association (LAA) was created to foster
29 recreational activities, promote enhancements, and advocate for responsible behavior
30 within the Lake Attitash area and its watershed. This mission is dedicated to serving the
31 best interests of both residents and visitors alike. They also wish to preserve the lake's
32 aesthetic, environmental, and recreational values.⁵⁴ The Association deals with the
33 overgrowth of nuisance weeds, water quality, boating safety, recreational opportunities,
34 and wildlife preservation through local fundraising efforts, regional advocacy, and
35 community meetings in Merrimac and Merrimack Valley.

36
37 MERRIMACK VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION

38 The Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC) serves as a collaborative
39 organization working with cities and towns in the Merrimack Valley region to address
40 issues related to land use, economic development, transportation, and environmental

⁵³ Town of Merrimac. *Open Space Committee*. <https://townofmerrimac.com/open-space-committee/>

⁵⁴ Lake Attitash Association. *About the Lake Attitash Association*. <https://lakeattitash.org/>

1 planning. The commission works with Merrimac and 14 surrounding communities.
2 MVPC held several Community Resilience Workshops in Merrimac throughout 2020,
3 helping residents identify infrastructure, social, and environmental vulnerabilities. This
4 has helped raise awareness on the current consequences of climate change and how to
5 use town resources to become more resilient to future climate change impacts.⁵⁵

6
7 Merrimac has also implemented a pedestrian upgrade to its village center and open
8 multi-use trails in collaboration with MVPC in 2015 with an Active Transportation Plan.
9 This plan outlines the current state of Merrimac and MVPC recommended
10 improvements to streets, sidewalks, and recreational trails. The plan noted that the well-
11 maintained sidewalks and walking paths are located in the village center, where the
12 community is densely settled. The McLaren Trail lies close by? along a former rail line,
13 but it needs a better-defined entrance on Church Street.⁵⁶ MVPC also found that these
14 entrances were difficult to find, and more signage would be beneficial. Children walk
15 and ride bikes to school and the playgrounds, usually using sidewalks, though the
16 inclusion of bike lines around these areas could improve safety. Broad Street, a popular
17 bicycling route connecting to the river, could potentially serve more cyclists if it was
18 updated for safe access.⁵⁷ The MVPC continues to engage with Merrimac on plans and
19 reports geared toward municipal improvements.
20

21 MERRIMACK RIVER WATERSHED COUNCIL

22 The Merrimack River Watershed Council (MRWC) is a non-profit organization aiming to
23 improve and conserve the watershed for people and wildlife through advocacy,
24 education, recreation, and science.⁵⁸ MRWC was founded in 1976 when the Merrimack
25 River was one of the ten most polluted rivers in the country. They have since been
26 working toward maintaining clean water and improving recreational opportunities for
27 the region.⁵⁹ They offer opportunities for boating to communities spanning from the
28 Lawrence Dam to the New Hampshire border. Additionally, they deliver online
29 educational programs and play a role in shaping environmental policies related to the
30 Merrimack River.
31

32 ESSEX COUNTY GREENBELT ASSOCIATION

33 The Essex County Greenbelt Association works with municipalities around Essex
34 County to conserve farmland, wildlife habitat, and scenic landscapes throughout the

⁵⁵ Merrimack Valley Planning Commission. An Integrated Climate Change Strategy for the Commonwealth. <https://mvpc.org/merrimac-mvp-storymap/>

⁵⁶ Merrimack Valley Planning Commission. Active Transportation Plan Final 2015. <https://mvpc.org/wp-content/uploads/FINAL-MVMPO-2021-2025-TIP.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Merrimack Valley Planning Commission. Active Transportation Plan Final 2015. <https://mvpc.org/wp-content/uploads/FINAL-MVMPO-2021-2025-TIP.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Merrimack River Watershed Council. About. October 2, 2023. <https://merrimack.org/about/>

⁵⁹ Merrimack River Watershed Council. About. October 2, 2023. <https://merrimack.org/about/>



1 region.⁶⁰ They own several parcels of land in Merrimac and contribute funding towards
2 conservation land and trail maintenance. They also help to develop the Open Space and
3 Recreation Plan for Merrimac every several years. The most recent land attained by the
4 Association is Beaver Pond Reservation. It was conserved in two stages: 23 acres were
5 protected on the east side of Battis Road in 2019, and an additional 16 acres were
6 conserved across the road in 2020. Town Meeting voted to create a conservation
7 restriction on the property held by the Association, allowing them to apply for grants
8 such as the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Conservation Partnership Program on the
9 Town's behalf.⁶¹ Ensuring the preservation of this property plays a crucial role in
10 safeguarding the drinking water for Merrimac residents, as the entire water supply for
11 this area is derived from wells.

13 COMMUNITY NEEDS AND GOALS

14 As per the 2016-2023 Open Space and Recreation Report crafted by the OSC, the
15 community expresses a collective aspiration to enrich different aspects of natural
16 resources, open space, and recreation.⁶² The OSC and other Town officials aim to
17 enhance the overall quality of life by implementing and retaining the following practices:

- 19 • Protect the town's drinking water supply
- 20 • Manage species' habitats
- 21 • Improve access to and manage existing open space, especially at the town's
22 water access points
- 23 • Manage the impacts of new growth on the Town's natural resources
- 24 • Manage the town's existing recreation facilities
- 25 • Provide diverse recreational opportunities for all residents
- 26 • Create small parks and neighborhood open space
- 27 • Acquire more land for field sports
- 28 • Create and link trail and bike paths
- 29 • Maintain sidewalks
- 30 • Manage the open space inventory⁶³

31
32 The continued utilization of these community policies, practices, and organizations
33 reflects a dedicated commitment to safeguarding and improving open space and
34 recreation in Merrimac and Essex County. Through promoting sustainable practices,
35 active collaboration, and a unified vision, the Town aspires to develop a dynamic and
36 inclusive environment for both present and future generations.

37
38

⁶⁰ Essex County Greenbelt Association. *About*. <https://ecga.org/>

⁶¹ Essex County Greenbelt Association. *Property: Beaver Pond Reservation*. <https://ecga.org/>

⁶² Merrimac Open Space Committee. *Open Space and Recreation Plan 2016-2023*, 5.

⁶³ Merrimac Open Space Committee. *Open Space and Recreation Plan 2016-2023*, 43.

4.4 Housing

Introduction

Situated in the Merrimack Valley between Amesbury and Haverhill, the Town of Merrimac is a bedroom community, meaning it is largely residential, and many residents commute to workplaces in other communities. The Town faces difficult challenges in providing housing for current and prospective residents. Merrimac has developed more housing in recent years, but exceedingly high demand has contributed to increased housing prices. This section examines the housing landscape in Merrimac – who lives here, and what can be interpreted from demographics on housing needs within the community.

Existing Conditions

HOUSING STOCK

As of 2021, Merrimac contains an estimated 2,673 total housing units, with approximately 97 percent of which are occupied.⁶⁴

Building Types and Sizes

Single-family detached homes make up the majority of Merrimac’s housing supply at a proportion of nearly 60 percent of all units (Table 4.4.1). The number of units in three- or four-unit structures follows at 12.6 percent of all units. The third largest category of homes is mobile homes at 11 percent. Most of these units are located in two mobile home parks: North Shore Community at 107 East Main Street and Carriage Town Park at 124 West Main Street, containing approximately 200 and 40 units, respectively.⁶⁵ This type of structure is generally more affordable than traditional single-family detached homes.

Furthermore, the number of two-unit structures is one of the smallest categories of housing types at 4.8 percent of all units. Ownership distinguishes two-unit structures or duplexes from attached single-family units. For a duplex, the two units and the entire building are under one ownership. For attached single-family homes, each unit is separately owned but shares a wall with similar units under a different owner. This type of housing unit can be thought of as the individual units in a townhouse or condominium, and these building structures or complexes contain two or more separately owned units. There is a significant number of both attached single-family units and two-unit duplexes near the center of town. Additionally, the Town allows duplex and multi-family structure owners to convert their properties into condominiums and place the individual units up for sale to a different owner.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2021. Table B25002.

⁶⁵ MH Village, “North Shore Community Mobile Home Park.”

⁶⁶ Town of Merrimac Inspectional Services, “Condominium Conversion.”



1 Table 4.4.1 compares Merrimac’s composition of housing structure types to the rest of
 2 Essex County. The town has a larger percentage of one-unit, detached (also known as
 3 single-family detached), and mobile homes than the county as a whole. In contrast,
 4 Merrimac has a much lower share of higher-density units, especially larger apartment
 5 complexes.
 6

Type of Structure	Merrimac		Essex County	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Single-Family, Detached	1,593	59.6%	164,423	50.6%
Single-Family, Attached	193	7.2%	22,790	7.0%
2 Units	129	4.8%	32,114	9.9%
3 or 4 Units	336	12.6%	38,591	11.9%
5 or More Units	129	4.8%	65,426	20.1%
Mobile Home or Other	293*	11.0%	1,884	0.6%
Total Housing Units	2,673	100.0%	325,228	100.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2021. Table B25024.
 *Note these are ACS estimates that are subject to margins of error. Mobile home park owners confirm that there are approximately 240 mobile units in Merrimac.

7
 8 Essex County encompasses communities with characteristics vastly different from and
 9 geographically distant to Merrimac, such as the Cities of Haverhill, Lawrence, and Lynn.
 10 Table 4.4.2 provides a comparison of Merrimac with nearby communities that are more
 11 similar in characteristics, offering a closer depiction of the town’s housing profile within
 12 the Merrimack Valley region. In comparison, Merrimac maintains a relatively average
 13 percentage of detached single-family homes but the largest share of mobile homes in the
 14 region.
 15

	Merrimac		Amesbury		West Newbury		Salisbury		Groveland	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Single-Family, Detached	1,593	59.6%	4,010	52.6%	1,673	94.8%	2,791	55.7%	2,074	81.4%
Single-Family, Attached	193	7.2%	581	7.6%	47	2.7%	564	11.3%	282	11.1%
2 Units	129	4.8%	520	6.8%	31	1.8%	372	7.4%	78	3.1%
3 or 4 Units	336	12.6%	506	6.6%	8	0.5%	416	8.3%	56	2.2%
5 or More Units	129	4.8%	2,005	26.3%	0	0.0%	632	12.6%	57	2.2%
Mobile Home or Other	293	11.0%	0	0.0%	6	0.3%	237	4.7%	0	0.0%
Total Housing Units	2,673		7,622		1,765		5,012		2,547	

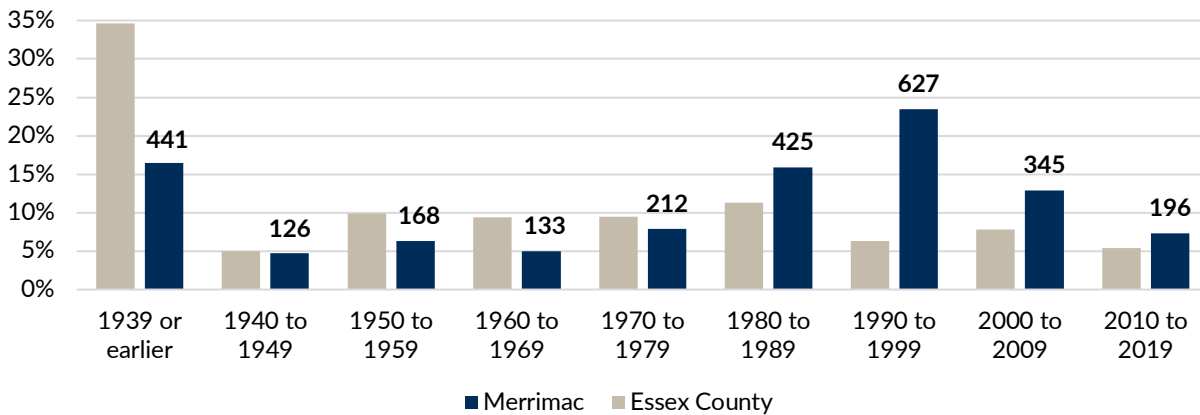
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2021. Table B25024.

16
 17 *Housing Age and Production*
 18 In comparison to the county’s housing stock, Merrimac contains considerably newer
 19 homes. According to estimates from the 2021 American Community Survey, the median

1 construction year of housing units in Merrimac is 1986 compared to 1959 for Essex
 2 County.⁶⁷ Furthermore, nearly 35 percent of current housing structures in the county
 3 were built before 1940, as shown in Figure 4.4.1. In contrast, Merrimac witnessed the
 4 construction of a significant portion (23.5 percent) of its current housing structures in the
 5 1990s, with over half built since 1980. The number of units built has gradually declined
 6 since the town’s peak production period in the 1990s. Participants in community
 7 meetings point to increasing construction costs as contributing to the relative lack of
 8 production in recent years. The result is a limited buying and selling market, further
 9 discouraging developers from initiating housing projects.

Figure 4.4.1 Number of Units Built by Period

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2021
 Table B25034



11 According to local building permit records, the Town approved 60 new residential units
 12 for construction between 2018 to 2022. These include 21 single-family homes, 18
 13 townhomes (attached single-family units), 10 duplexes (20 units), and 1 mobile home.⁶⁸

14 HOUSEHOLD DEMOGRAPHICS

15 Household Types

16 According to census estimates, there are 2,589 total households in Merrimac. The town’s
 17 household profile is largely family oriented as Table 4.4.3 shows that 67.9 percent of
 18 households in town are families. Household unit sizes are also increasing, with 25.7
 19 percent having four bedrooms or more, up from 18.7 percent in 2016 and 14.0 percent in
 20 2011 as shown in Figure 4.4.2. Simultaneously, the share of one-, two-, and three-
 21 bedroom units have fallen since 2011. These changes indicate that developers often have
 22 family homebuyers in mind as home sizes in Merrimac’s housing market have increased
 23 to support larger families. The average household size in Merrimac is 2.58 people

⁶⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2021. Table B25035.

⁶⁸ Town of Merrimac, “Permit Listing Report 2018-2022.”



1 compared to the county at 2.56 and the state at 2.48 residents.⁶⁹ Over a quarter of
 2 householders live alone, but census estimates show only 4.2 percent of units have one
 3 bedroom.

4

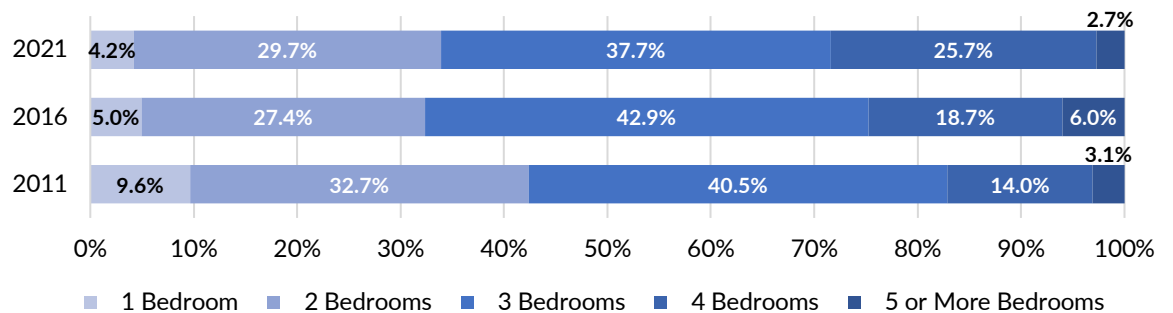
Table 4.4.3 Household Types		
	Number	Percent
Family Households	1,758	67.9%
Married-Couple Family	1,412	54.5%
Single-Parent Family:	346	13.4%
Male Householder	66	2.5%
Female Householder	280	10.8%
Nonfamily Households	831	32.1%
Householder Living Alone	674	26.0%
Householder Living with Others	157	6.1%
Total	2,589	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2021. Table B11001.

5

6

Figure 4.4.2 Share of Household Units by Number of Bedrooms
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates,
 2021 Table B25024



7

8

9 Furthermore, Figure 4.4.3 shows most households in Merrimac are owner-occupied. Of
 10 2,620 households, 82.9 percent (2,173 units) are owner-occupied, and 17.1 percent (447)
 11 are rented. This proportion of owner-occupied units in Merrimac is significantly higher
 12 than the county (62.5 percent) and the state (60.4 percent). This aligns with the town's
 13 demographic profile, which mainly consists of family households and residents seeking
 14 homeownership to establish roots and raise a family in Merrimac, as expressed by
 15 residents in community meetings.⁷⁰ In contrast, Essex County and Massachusetts have

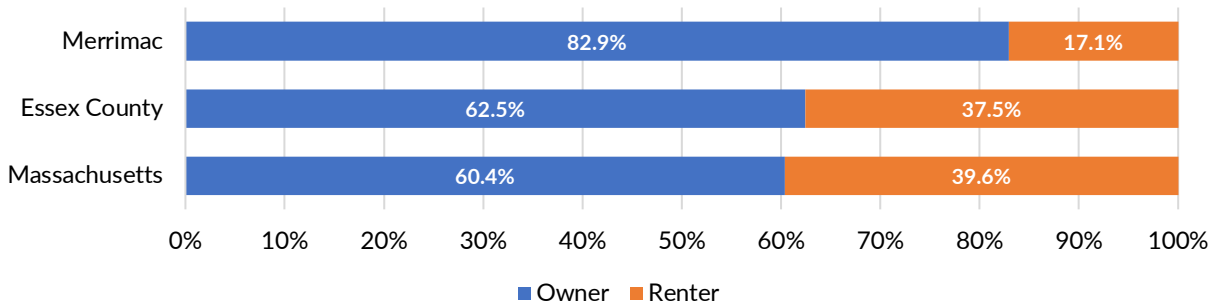
⁶⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2021. Table B25010.

⁷⁰ See *Community Meeting Summary* in Appendix.

1 significantly larger shares of renter-occupied housing. This is likely explained by the
 2 influence of housing characteristics of major cities on county- and state-wide statistics.
 3

Figure 4.4.3 Household Tenure

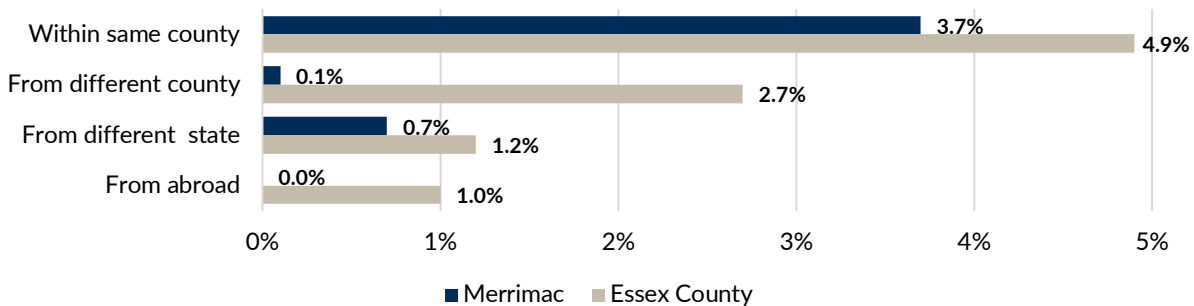
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2021
 Table B25003



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 5
 6 *Household Vacancy and Mobility*
 7 Merrimac experiences relatively low migration of residents into or out of town compared to other communities in Essex County (Figure 4.4.4), especially in recent years. This can be explained by a few variables. Merrimac’s occupancy rate of units reached nearly 96.9 percent, according to 2021 census estimates.⁷¹ Compared to the county’s rate of 94.7 percent, fewer units in town are available for renters and buyers looking to move into Merrimac. A low vacancy rate of 3.1 percent indicates housing demands exceed housing supply, which can increase sale and rental prices, making it more difficult for potential buyers or renters to move into Merrimac.⁷²
 15

Figure 4.4.4 Geographic Origins of Residents

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2021
 Table B25003



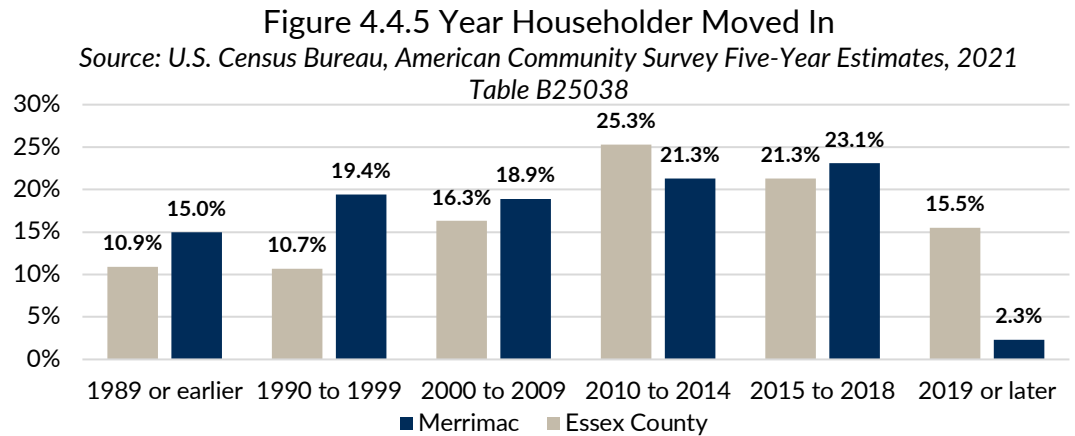
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⁷¹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2021. Table B25004.

⁷² Smith, G. “Understanding Rental Vacancy Rates for Real Estate Investing in 2023.” Azibo. May 10, 2023. <https://www.azibo.com/blog/rental-vacancy-rates>.



1 Figure 4.4.5 shows when residents moved into their current household unit. It depicts a
 2 very low percentage of residents moving in recent years (2019 or later) at 2.3 percent.
 3 This suggests very few residents moved into Merrimac, or within the town, and there
 4 was a drastic fall in household mobility. Several factors may have contributed to this: an
 5 increase in home prices preventing people from moving, high occupancy rates, low
 6 housing availability, and the COVID-19 pandemic.
 7



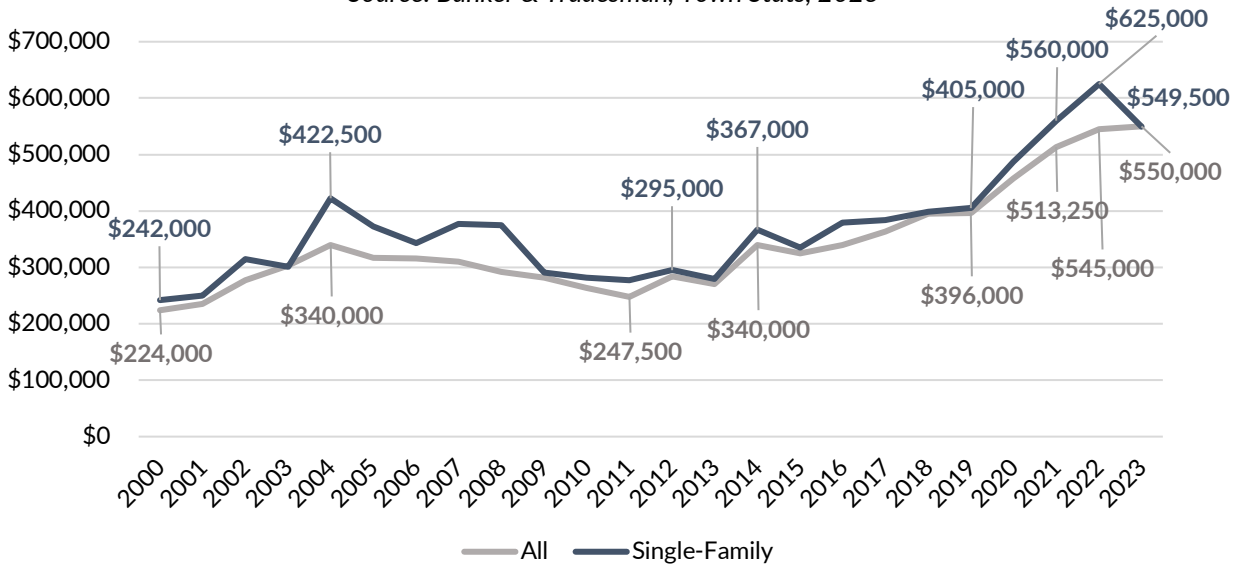
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10 HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

11 *Home Values*

12 Figure 4.4.6 illustrates the pattern of median home values for all homes, single-family
 13 homes, and condos in Merrimac from 2000 to 2023. The value of an average home in
 14 Merrimac has more than doubled since 2000, from \$224,000 to \$550,000 in 2023. Single-
 15 family homes are generally valued higher, but the median sales price currently matches
 16 the overall median for all homes sold in 2023. As housing production declined since the
 17 year 2000 (see Figure 4.4.1), home values have conversely increased. There was a
 18 significant rise in value until the mid-2000s before the housing market collapsed during
 19 the Great Recession (2007-2009). Once the market recovered, home values gradually
 20 increased and were at all-time high levels, save for a drop in values in 2023.
 21

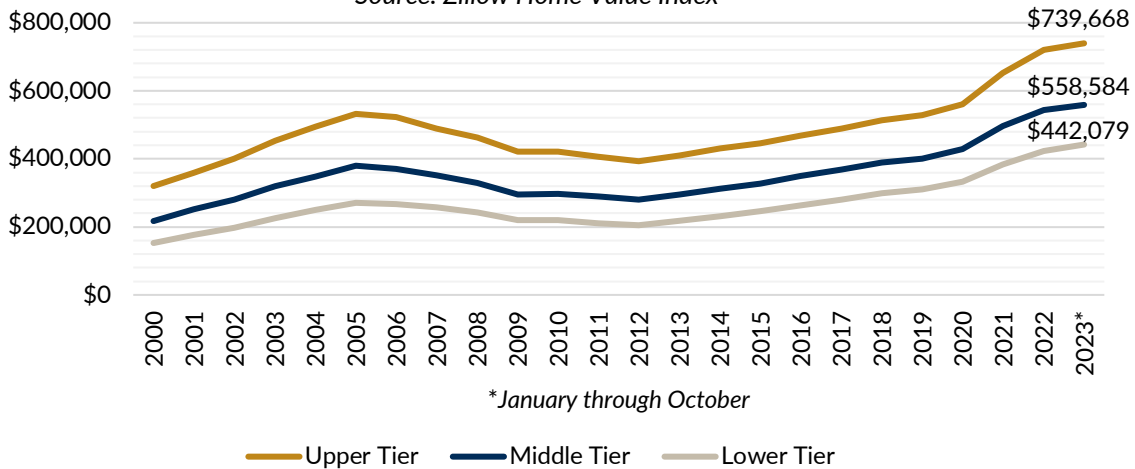
Figure 4.4.6 Median Sales Price of Homes in Merrimac
 Source: Banker & Tradesman, Town Stats, 2023



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Zillow provides home value data in their Zillow Home Value Index, generating data for several different categories of housing and locations in the country. Figure 4.4.7 displays the home values in Merrimac in three tiers: lower (5th to 35th percentile), middle (35th to 65th percentile), and higher (65th to 95th percentile). By October 2023, the typical home values for the lower, middle, and upper tiers were \$442,079, \$558,584, and \$739,668, respectively.

Figure 4.4.7 Typical Home Value by Tier
 Source: Zillow Home Value Index



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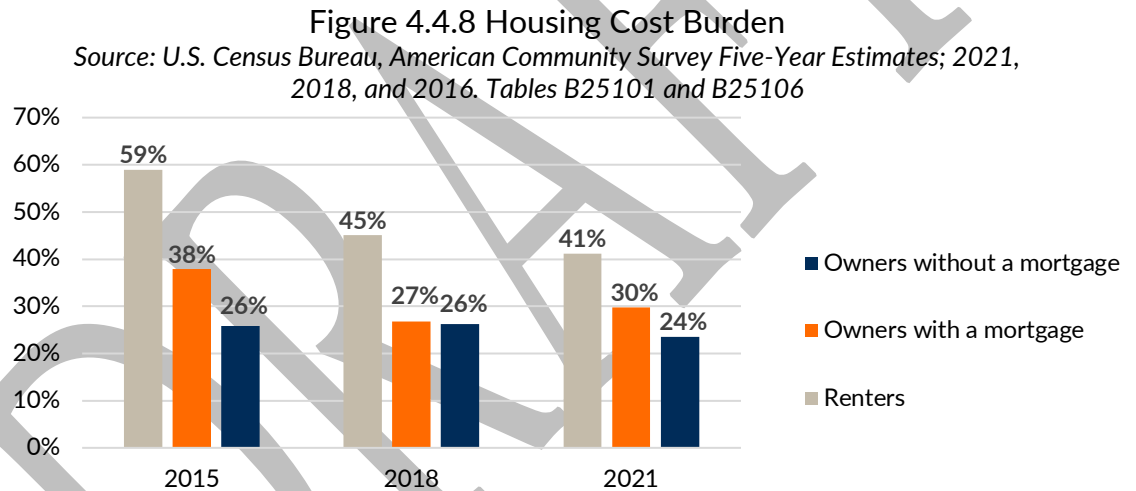
In Merrimac, there is a sizeable community of mobile homes that provide a more affordable option for residents who cannot afford to live in newer developments or the



1 more typical single-family detached homes. According to 2021 census estimates, the
2 median value of a mobile home was \$101,400, less than one-fifth the median value of a
3 single-family home at \$549,500.⁷³
4

5 *Cost Burdens*

6 Figure 4.4.8 displays the percentage of homeowners and renters who experience high
7 housing cost burdens. Cost burdens are considered high if the costs of housing;
8 including but not limited to mortgage, rent, taxes, utilities, and maintenance; exceed 30
9 percent of the household income. In Merrimac, 24 percent of owners without a mortgage,
10 30 percent of owners with a mortgage, and 41 percent of renters experience cost burdens.
11 Since 2015, these percentages have decreased, which may contradict the increase in home
12 values and sale prices. However, other factors to consider are household incomes being
13 adjusted to inflation and the increase in wealthier homebuyers and renters outpacing the
14 rate of growth in home values.
15



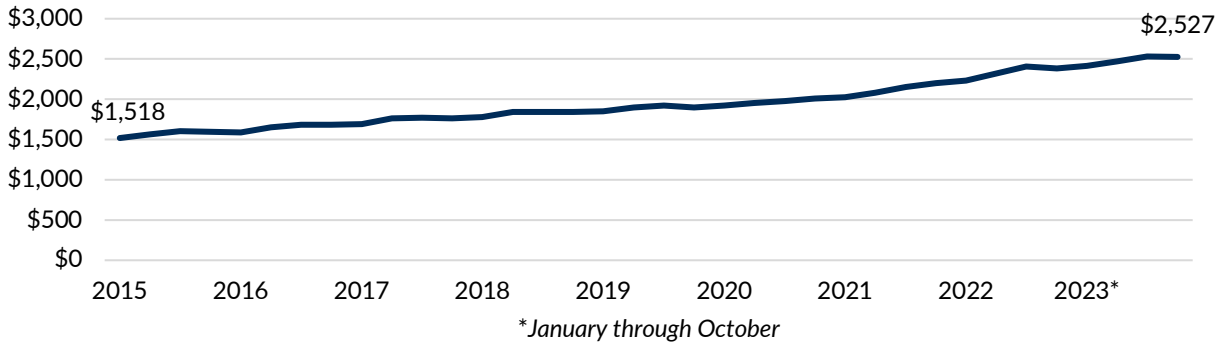
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18 Figure 4.4.9. shows that the average monthly rent in Essex County has increased two-
19 thirds since 2015, from \$1,518 to \$2,527 by the fourth quarter of 2023. While Zillow does
20 not provide rent data specifically for Merrimac, the county-wide trend does provide a
21 degree of insight into rent trends for the town.
22

⁷³ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2021. Table B25083.

Figure 4.4.9 Average Rents in Essex County

Source: Zillow Observed Rent Index



Massachusetts’ Chapter 40B statute requires that communities have at least 10 percent of housing stock under affordability restrictions to grant the town’s Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) flexible control over housing projects. Merrimac falls short in providing what the State considers affordable housing as of June 2023. Only 5.3 percent of Merrimac’s total year-round housing units are counted towards the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) that Massachusetts uses to calculate the number of affordable housing units? for a given town (see Table 4.4.4).

Table 4.4.4: Merrimac SHI

Project Name	Address	Tenure	SHI Units	Expires?	Comprehensive Permit?
Merrimac Village	52 Middle Street	Rental	48	Perpetuity	Yes
N/A	Lincoln & Green Streets	Rental	4	Perpetuity	No
Merrimac Residence	13 Locust Street	Rental	10	2042	No
DDS Group Homes	Confidential	Rental	15	N/A	No
Cobbler's Brook Condominiums	19 Broad Street	Ownership	6	Perpetuity	Yes
The Village of Merrimac	86 West Main Street & 3 Nancy Ann Lane	Ownership	8	Perpetuity	Yes
Greenleaf Park Apartments II	Green Leaf Drive	Rental	55	2103	Yes
Total Units:			146		
% Subsidized:			5.32%		

Source: MA Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, 2023

While the town does not technically meet the threshold of 10 percent affordable housing as established by Chapter 40B, there are approximately 240 mobile homes in Merrimac according to mobile home park owners. This a significant number of housing units that many residents consider affordable but do not count towards the SHI due to current



1 policy. However, the goal of creating affordable housing is not simply to meet Chapter
2 40B's requirements but to meet the real housing needs of the community. Assessments of
3 housing in Merrimac suggest there needs to be more affordable housing to address high
4 demand.
5

6 **Local Policies and Practices**

7 LOCAL GROUPS AND PLANNING EFFORTS

8 *Merrimac Housing Authority*

9 The Merrimac Housing Authority was established as required by the Massachusetts
10 General Law (MGL) Chapter 121B. Their mission is to secure and provide housing for
11 low-income families, elderly residents, and people with disabilities. They utilize several
12 State funding programs to administer housing assistance to those with limited financial
13 means. As such, they follow an income-based approach, for which eligibility is
14 determined by the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC).⁷⁴
15

16 *Affordable Housing Board of Trustees*

17 This board was established to create and preserve affordable housing for the benefit of
18 low- and moderate-income households in Merrimac. The goal of the Board is to increase
19 the availability of housing in Merrimac that meets the state standard for affordability
20 while retaining the nature of our community.⁷⁵
21

22 *Housing Production Plan*

23 The Board worked with consultants, including the Merrimack Valley Planning
24 Commission (MVPC) to draft the 2018-2022 Housing Production Plan (HPP). This plan
25 presents a comprehensive analysis of the town's housing condition, including a needs
26 assessment, as well as goals and implementation strategies for the future of housing,
27 with the support of town residents and stakeholders. It was designed to educate the
28 public and provide general guidance for future development to meet the needs of the
29 community. It also served as a tool to ensure timely progress on these goals. As of April
30 2024, the Town is again working with MVPC to develop an updated regional HPP that
31 will include Merrimac.
32
33

⁷⁴ Merrimac Housing Authority.

⁷⁵ Town of Merrimac, Affordable Housing Board of Trustees.

4.5 Economic Development

Introduction

Merrimac's economy has changed from the Town's historic position as a manufacturing and agricultural center in the early twentieth century. Today, Merrimac is predominantly a residential community. The Town's limited economy is comprised of mostly small businesses employed in service industries, and public administration. The primary concerns facing Merrimac's economic development today are an aging workforce, lower than average education among its residents, and wages lagging behind the rest of Essex County and the state. Despite these challenges, Merrimac does benefit from robust and active regional organizations, rising wages, and significant developable land with access to 495 already zoned for economic uses.

Existing Conditions and Trends

POPULATION AND LABOR FORCE

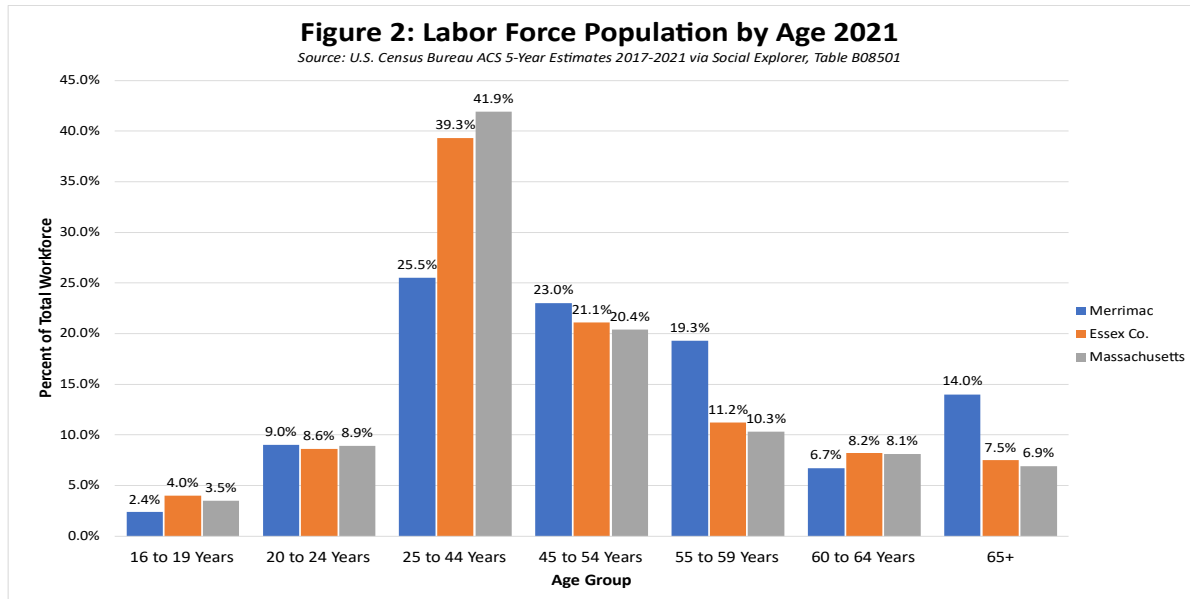
In 2021, the total labor force in Merrimac was 3,683.⁷⁶ The labor force is comprised of residents 16 years and older who are working or actively looking for work. In 2021, the labor force participation rate in Merrimac was 67 percent, the third lowest among its neighbors and well below the county average. However, Merrimac's rate is in line with the Massachusetts average.

Merrimac's labor force, like its overall population, is aging. As shown in Figure 4.5.1, nearly 21 percent of the labor force is at or within 5 years of the retirement age (65 years old), significantly higher than the county and state rates. Merrimac also lacks early and mid-career workers. While workers between the ages of 25 and 44 make up 25 percent of the total labor force, the same group makes up 39 percent of the Essex County workforce.⁷⁷ A preponderance of older individuals in the labor force and fewer younger workers suggest that Merrimac's labor force will shrink over time as older workers leave the workforce, and fewer young workers replace them.

⁷⁶ U.S. Census Bureau ACS 5-Year Estimates 2017-2021 via Social Explorer Table B08502.

⁷⁷ U.S. Census Bureau ACS 5-Year Estimates 2017-2021 via Social Explorer Table B08502.

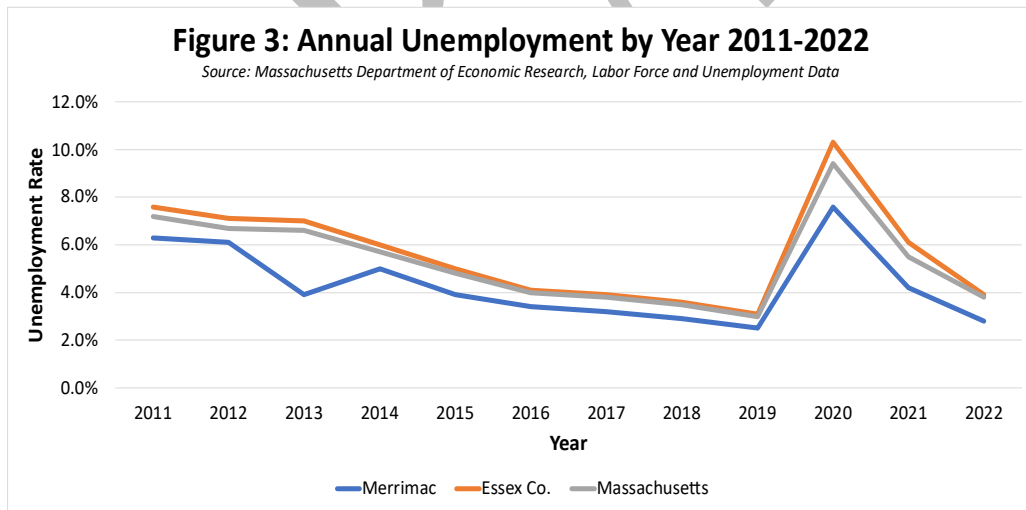




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EMPLOYMENT

Over the past decade, Merrimac has consistently enjoyed an unemployment rate lower than the county and state. As shown in Figure 4.5.2, since 2011, Merrimac’s unemployment rate has remained roughly one point below the state average, even in times of economic hardship such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Unemployment increased sharply in 2020, rising to 7.6%. However, Merrimac’s employment has largely recovered, and in 2022 Merrimac’s unemployment returned to pre-pandemic levels.



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15

In 2021, 3,615 residents were employed across all sectors of the economy. The majority were employed in the private sector, with 10 percent of the labor force employed in the public sector and 10 percent self-employed. Less than one percent were unpaid family

1 workers.⁷⁸ Compared to county and state-wide trends, more Merrimac workers are
 2 employed in the private sector, and fewer are self-employed, employed in the public
 3 sector or in private non-profits. This appears to be a local trend, as these rates are in line
 4 with Merrimac’s surrounding municipalities both in Massachusetts and New
 5 Hampshire.

6
 7 **EDUCATION**

8 In Merrimac, 96 percent of workers have at least a high school diploma or GED
 9 equivalent. This exceeds the rates in Essex County (90 percent) and Massachusetts (91
 10 percent). However, significantly fewer than average Merrimac residents possess a
 11 bachelor’s degree or higher. In Merrimac, 34 percent of residents over the age of 25 have
 12 completed at least a bachelor’s degree, compared to the state average of 45 percent, and
 13 the Essex County average of 41 percent.⁷⁹ While the percent of Merrimac’s residents
 14 possessing a Bachelor’s Degree is in line with state and county shares, Merrimac
 15 residents’ rates of master’s, professional and doctorate degrees are well below state and
 16 regional figures, as shown in Table 4.5.1.

Table 4.5.1: Percent of the Population Over 25 by Highest Level of Education 2021

Community	Less than High School	High School Graduate	Some College	Bachelor’s Degree	Master’s Degree	Professional School Degree	Doctorate Degree
Merrimac	4.0%	28.5%	33.6%	25.1%	7.9%	0.6%	0.4%
Amesbury	5.0%	26.5%	28.9%	25.0%	10.7%	1.6%	2.5%
Georgetown	2.1%	17.3%	25.8%	34.0%	17.3%	2.4%	1.2%
Groveland	3.6%	23.1%	24.1%	30.5%	17.0%	1.4%	0.3%
Haverhill	9.9%	30.5%	29.8%	19.8%	7.4%	1.4%	1.2%
Newbury	2.2%	17.9%	24.0%	33.5%	18.5%	2.0%	1.9%
Salisbury	7.4%	25.8%	24.0%	28.6%	12.2%	0.4%	1.5%
West Newbury	2.5%	11.7%	22.2%	35.9%	17.2%	5.4%	5.1%
Newton, NH	4.2%	33.1%	26.2%	24.4%	9.7%	0.2%	2.2%
Plaistow, NH	2.5%	36.0%	30.2%	19.1%	11.6%	0.0%	0.7%
South Hampton, NH	1.5%	17.9%	34.3%	25.1%	18.9%	1.9%	0.4%
Essex County	10.3%	24.4%	24.2%	24.5%	12.5%	2.3%	1.8%
Massachusetts	8.8%	23.2%	22.8%	24.8%	14.3%	3.1%	3.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-year Estimates 2017-2021 via Social Explorer Table SEA12001A

⁷⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2017-2021 via Social Explorer, Table A17009.

⁷⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-year Estimates 2017-2021 via Social Explorer Table SEA12001A.



1 WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

2 There are no higher education or vocational training programs for the general
3 population in Merrimac proper. The nearest center for higher education is Northern
4 Essex County Community College in neighboring Haverhill. Whittier Regional
5 Vocational High School, also in Haverhill offers vocational programming for high
6 schoolers and night programming for adults.⁸⁰

7
8 Workforce development services are offered by the Merrimack Valley Workforce Board
9 (MVWB), the regional MassHire Workforce Board for the Merrimack Valley. MVWB
10 provides career services and training to local residents and workforce support for local
11 businesses. MVWB maintains offices in both Lawrence and Haverhill.⁸¹ The University of
12 Massachusetts Lowell has also recently opened a satellite campus in Haverhill. This
13 campus does not offer courses but does provide workforce development and corporate
14 education for startups and entrepreneurs, a business incubator, a fabricating lab and co-
15 working space for small businesses.⁸²

16
17 Within 20 miles of Merrimac there are a number of colleges and universities offering
18 undergraduate and graduate courses, including:

- 19 • Merrimack College (North Andover, MA)
- 20 • University of Massachusetts Lowell (Lowell, MA)
- 21 • North Point Bible College and Seminary (Haverhill, MA)
- 22 • Cambridge College Lawrence (Lawrence, MA)
- 23 • Northern Essex Community College, Haverhill Campus (Haverhill, MA)
- 24 • Northern Essex Community College, Lawrence Campus (Lawrence, MA)

25
26 OCCUPATIONS OF MERRIMAC RESIDENTS

27 Most of Merrimac’s labor force is employed within five industry groups, which together
28 account for 60 percent of all Merrimac’s employed labor force. The largest industry
29 group by total employment is “Educational Services, and Healthcare and Social
30 Assistance”, employing 19.9 percent of Merrimac’s employed labor force. Retail Trade
31 (14.7 percent), Manufacturing (13.6 percent), and Professional, Scientific, and
32 Management, and Administrative and Waste Management Services (12.4 percent)
33 comprise the next largest industries.⁸³

34
35 It is also helpful to analyze the Town’s Industry Quotients (IQs) to help understand the
36 competitive strengths of Merrimac’s labor force. An IQ compares the percent of
37 Merrimac residents employed in an industry with the percent of the workforce

⁸⁰ Whittier Regional High School <https://whittiertech.org/whittier-tech>

⁸¹ Merrimack Valley Workforce Board, *About*. Accessed January 2024.
<https://www.masshiremvwb.org/about/>

⁸² University of Massachusetts Lowell, Haverhill Campus. Accessed January 2024.
<https://www.uml.edu/haverhill/>

⁸³ U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates 2017-2021 via Social Explorer Table 17004.

1 employed in that industry in Essex County, as well as statewide. IQs are important
 2 because they illustrate a community's competitive employment strengths and help
 3 identify any gaps or disconnects between the skills of local residents and the
 4 employment opportunities available in the community. Industries are considered to
 5 have a high IQ if the IQ is over 1.10. This indicates that the industry is a specialty of
 6 Merrimac residents, as more of the local labor force is involved in this industry than
 7 average. Merrimac's high IQ industries are: construction; manufacturing; wholesale
 8 trade; retail trade; transportation and warehousing, and utilities; and other services
 9 excluding public administration, as shown in Table 4.5.2. While industry groups with a
 10 high IQ have a higher-than-average presence in Merrimac, they do not necessarily
 11 employ the largest total share of residents. For example, "Transportation and
 12 Warehousing, and Utilities" has the highest IQ in Merrimac. "Transportation and
 13 Warehousing, and Utilities" has an IQ of 1.80, meaning that this industry is 80 percent
 14 larger than the state average. However, this industry employs only 7.4 percent of the
 15 employed labor force.

Table 4.5.2: Employment by Industry and Industrial Quotients for Merrimac Residents 2021

Industry	Merrimac		Essex Co.		Massachusetts		IQ vs Co.	IQ vs State
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%		
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting, and Mining	13	0.4%	1,566	0.4%	15,477	0.4%	1.00	1.00
Construction	342	9.5%	24,695	5.9%	215,903	5.9%	1.61	1.61
Manufacturing	491	13.6%	44,979	10.7%	327,152	8.9%	1.27	1.53
Wholesale Trade	96	2.7%	9,089	2.2%	75,996	2.1%	1.23	1.29
Retail Trade	533	14.7%	45,925	10.9%	367,234	10.0%	1.35	1.47
Transportation and Warehousing, and Utilities	266	7.4%	19,227	4.6%	150,820	4.1%	1.61	1.80
Information	41	1.1%	8,400	2.0%	79,530	2.2%	0.55	0.50
Finance and Insurance, and Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	80	2.2%	29,875	7.1%	268,309	7.3%	0.31	0.30
Professional, Scientific, and Management, and Administrative and Waste Management Services	448	12.4%	60,352	14.4%	544,131	14.8%	0.86	0.84
Educational Services, and Health Care and Social Assistance	718	19.9%	105,894	25.2%	1,031,113	28.1%	0.79	0.71
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation, and Accommodation and Food Services	307	8.5%	34,552	8.2%	289,688	7.9%	1.04	1.08
Other Services, Except Public Administration	196	5.4%	18,634	4.4%	158,526	4.3%	1.23	1.26
Public Administration	84	2.3%	16,648	4.0%	143,140	3.9%	0.58	0.59
Total	3,615		419,836		3,667,019			

Source: American Community Survey 5-year Estimates 2017-2021 via Social Explorer Table 17004



1 The majority of Merrimac’s residents work outside of Merrimac. As shown in Table 4.5.3,
 2 in 2021 six percent of Merrimac’s labor force worked within the town. This made
 3 Merrimac the third most common place of work for Merrimac residents. The primary
 4 commuting destination is Boston, followed by other Merrimack Valley cities including
 5 Newburyport, Haverhill, Amesbury, and Andover. No New Hampshire destinations
 6 were part of the ten largest commuting destinations.⁸⁴

9 EARNINGS AND WAGES

10 The median earnings for a
 11 full time, year-round
 12 employed resident of
 13 Merrimac was \$61,910 in
 14 2021. This is seven percent
 15 and ten percent below the
 16 median earnings for Essex
 17 County and Massachusetts
 18 residents, respectively.⁸⁵

20 Across almost all industries,
 21 Merrimac’s employers pay
 22 lower average weekly wages
 23 than the average in Essex
 24 County. Only in the “Other
 25 Services, Excluding Public

26 Service” category are wages higher than the state or county average.⁸⁶ As can be seen in
 27 Table 4.5.4, most Merrimac wages are less than 85 percent of wages paid in the same
 28 industries on average in the county and state. In “Health Care and Social Assistance”,
 29 the largest employer, the mean weekly wage is only 48 percent of the average wage in
 30 Massachusetts, and 56 percent of the average in Essex County.

32 Merrimac’s wages rose by 27 percent from 2017 across all industries. However, this
 33 growth was on par with the wage growth seen across the state over the last five years.⁸⁷
 34 As a result, while Merrimac’s wages have grown since 2017, the gap between the wages
 35 in Merrimac and the state and county averages remains unchanged.

Table 4.5.3: Destinations for Merrimac Residents Commuting to Work 2021	
Location	Percent of Total Commuters
Boston	8.3%
Newburyport	7.4%
Merrimac	5.9%
Haverhill	5.5%
Amesbury	4.4%
Andover	4.0%
Danvers	2.4%
Beverly	2.1%
Lowell	2.1%
Lawrence	2.0%
All Other Destinations	56.0%
Source: US Census Bureau, LEHD OnTheMap Work Destination Analysis 2021	

⁸⁴ U.S. Census Bureau (2024) LEHR OnTheMap Work Destination Analysis 2021.

⁸⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates 2017-2021 via Social Explorer Table A14006.

⁸⁶ State of Massachusetts Department of Economic Research ES-202 Data on Industry Wages 2022.

⁸⁷ State of Massachusetts Department of Economic Research ES-202 Data on Industry Wages 2022.

NAICS	Description	Merrimac		Essex Co.		Massachusetts	
		Average Weekly Wage	Change since 2017	Average Weekly Wage	Change since 2017	Average Weekly Wage	Change since 2017
11	Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing	N/A	N/A	\$1,092	31%	\$1,198	3%
21	Mining, Quarrying, and Oil	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$1,572	19%
23	Construction	\$1,322	27%	\$1,630	19%	\$1,733	20%
31-33	Manufacturing	N/A	N/A	\$2,016	13%	\$1,932	14%
22	Utilities	N/A	N/A	\$2,252	22%	\$2,493	15%
42	Wholesale Trade	\$1,415	-9%	\$2,203	28%	\$2,391	27%
44-45	Retail Trade	\$779	28%	\$799	29%	\$868	35%
48-49	Transportation and	\$1,026	11%	\$1,179	20%	\$1,278	25%
51	Information	\$1,850		\$2,267	44%	\$2,958	41%
52	Finance and Insurance	\$1,286	40%	\$2,345	28%	\$3,729	28%
53	Real Estate and Rental and	N/A	N/A	\$1,592	31%	\$2,031	38%
54	Professional, and Technical	\$2,175	36%	\$2,854	44%	\$3,200	30%
55	Management of Companies	N/A	N/A	\$2,937	11%	\$2,927	16%
56	Administrative and Waste	\$913	55%	\$1,097	31%	\$1,264	39%
61	Educational Services	N/A	N/A	\$1,252	20%	\$1,406	18%
62	Health Care and Social	\$631	24%	\$1,133	23%	\$1,310	22%
71	Arts, Entertainment, and	N/A	N/A	\$645	28%	\$999	35%
72	Accommodation and Food	\$463	37%	\$579	37%	\$634	35%
81	Other Services, Except	\$860	26%	\$781	37%	\$964	35%
92	Public Administration	N/A	N/A	\$1,602	20%	\$1,718	17%
10	Total, All Industries	\$989	27%	\$1,407	26%	\$1,727	28%

Note: Due to the limited number of employers, the State of Massachusetts has excluded the weekly wage data for certain industries in Merrimac.

Source: State of Massachusetts Department of Economic Research ES-202 Data on Industry Wages 2022

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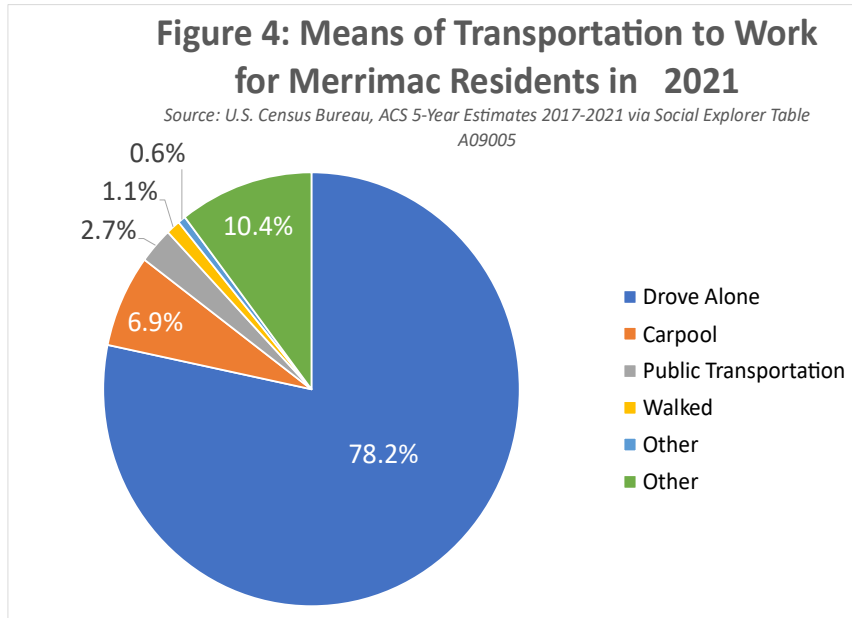
COMMUTING

According to OntheMap, 2,776 Merrimac residents commuted outside of Merrimac, 130 residents worked in town, and 452 workers commuted into town from other areas in 2021. The vast majority commute by car, with 78 percent of all workers driving alone, higher than the state average, but on par with nearby communities.⁸⁸ An additional ten

⁸⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates 2017-2021 OnTheMap Work Destination Analysis-All Jobs.



1 percent of the labor force work from home, slightly below the state share. Workers who
2 commuted other ways comprise less than five percent of the total labor force. Compared
3 to the state as a whole, more of Merrimac’s labor force drives alone ~~more than average~~,
4 and fewer residents work from home, use public transit, bike or walk to work. FIGURE
5 4.5.3 shows how many residents of Merrimac use each form of transportation.
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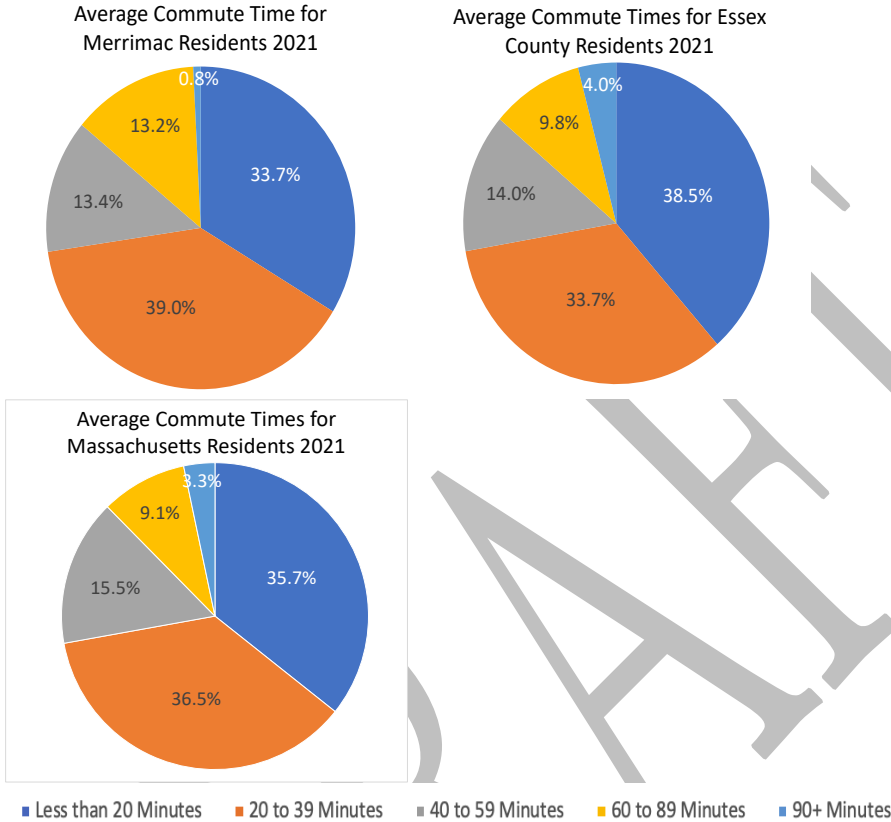
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Most Merrimac residents spend between 10 and 40 minutes commuting each way, on par with commute times in Essex County and Massachusetts. However, long commutes, any commute over 60 minutes each way, are more common in Merrimac and Essex County, likely due to the region’s distance from the employment centers in and around Boston. While long commutes are more common, within that group extremely long commutes (commutes of 90 minutes or more each way) are significantly less common, making up less than one percent of all Merrimac resident commutes. This is less than a third of rates seen in state and county averages.

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Figure 4.5.4: Average Commute Time in 2021

Source: U.S. Census Bureau ACS 5-year estimates 2017-2021 via Social Explorer Table A09003



EMPLOYMENT BASE

The employment base for a Town is comprised of those who work in a community, regardless of where they live. As Table 4.5.5 shows, most of the employment needs of local businesses are filled by commuters from other municipalities. Of the 880 jobs in Merrimac reported in the 2021 ACS, 24 percent are Merrimac residents. According to OntheMap, 22 percent of Merrimac’s jobs are filled by residents of neighboring communities including Haverhill, Amesbury, and Newton, NH. Most other commuters to Merrimac live elsewhere along the I-495 corridor.



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Merrimac’s employment base and industrial specializations have shifted from the Town’s past as a historic center for agriculture and manufacturing. The employment base of a town is the number of jobs in a Town, regardless of where the people filling those jobs reside. This is unlike the labor force, which is concerned with the jobs held by town residents, regardless of where they work. There is often overlap in these groups, and many Merrimac residents are a part of both Merrimac’s labor force (as a resident) and its employment base (holding a job in Merrimac). In 2021, the largest industry group by total employment was “Educational Services, and Health Care and Social Assistance,” accounting for 20.3 percent of all of the jobs in Merrimac. The other major employer industry groups in Merrimac are “Public Administration” (17.0 percent of all jobs), “Retail Trade” (14.7 percent of jobs), and “Professional, Scientific, and Management, and Administrative and Waste Management Services” (10.8 percent of all jobs). Merrimac’s employment is heavily concentrated in these industry groups, which account for 64 percent of all jobs in in town.

TABLE 4.5.5: Place of Origin for Workers Employed in Merrimac 2021

Origin	Percent of all Workers
Merrimac	24%
Haverhill	11%
Amesbury	8%
Newburyport	4%
Groveland	3%
Newton, NH	3%
Methuen	2%
Lowell	2%
Salisbury	2%
Georgetown	2%
All Other	4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau ACS 5-Year Estimates 2017-2021 OntheMap Work Destination Analysis

Table 4.5.6: Workers Employed in Merrimac by Industry 2021

Industry	Total	% of Jobs	Total	% of Jobs	Total	% of Jobs	LQ vs County	LQ vs State
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting, And Mining	0	0.0%	1,236	0.4%	15,347	0.4%	0.00	0.00
Construction	71	5.2%	18,823	5.5%	221,541	6.0%	0.95	0.87
Manufacturing	65	4.8%	46,246	13.6%	333,536	9.1%	0.35	0.53
Wholesale Trade	0	0.0%	6,415	1.9%	77,874	2.1%	0.00	0.00
Retail Trade	201	14.7%	38,357	11.3%	364,859	9.9%	1.30	1.48
Transportation and Warehousing, and Utilities	86	6.3%	12,204	3.6%	150,821	4.1%	1.75	1.54
Information	18	1.3%	6,163	1.8%	80,889	2.2%	0.72	0.59
Finance And Insurance, and Real Estate and Rental And Leasing	51	3.7%	20,294	6.0%	264,750	7.2%	0.62	0.51
Professional, Scientific, and Management, and Administrative and Waste Management Services	147	10.8%	41,734	12.3%	546,038	14.9%	0.88	0.72
Educational Services, and Health Care and Social Assistance	277	20.3%	91,620	26.9%	1,026,648	28.0%	0.75	0.73
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation, and Accommodation and Food Services	125	9.1%	29,342	8.6%	284,695	7.8%	1.06	1.17
Other Services (Except Public Administration)	93	6.8%	16,495	4.8%	156,929	4.3%	1.42	1.58
Public Administration	233	17.0%	11,653	3.4%	141,795	3.9%	5.00	4.36

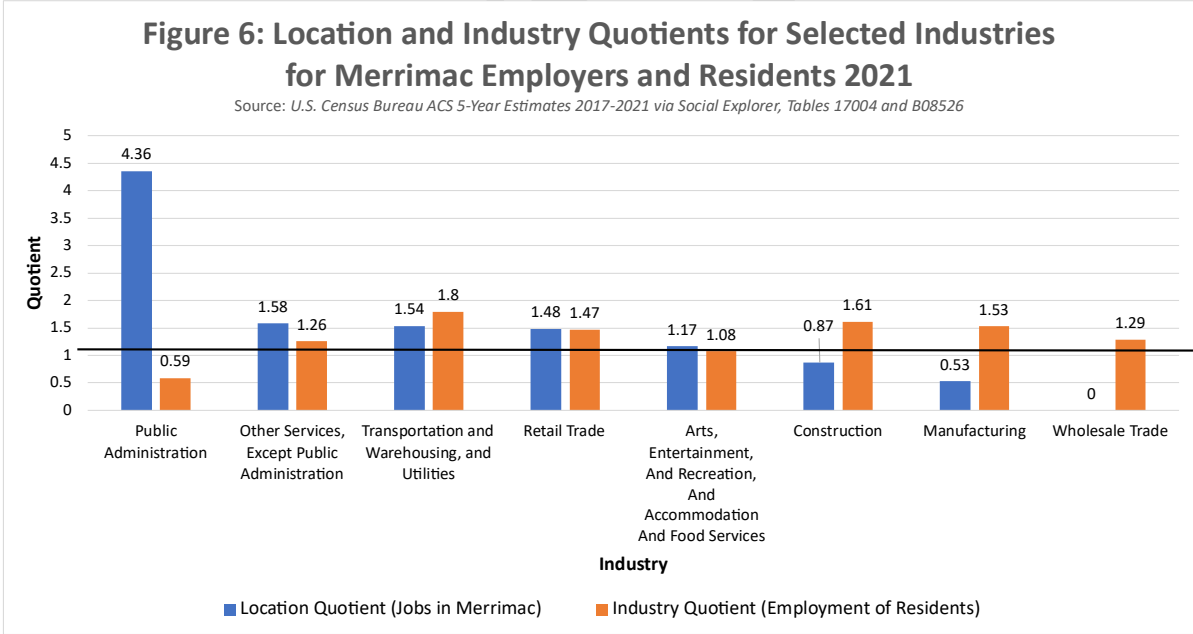
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates 2017-2021 via Social Explorer, Table B08526

1
2 It is helpful to look not just at the number of jobs in each industry, but also to how
3 industry employment compares to the industries across the state. Table 4.5.6 shows the
4 location quotients for Merrimac’s employment base. Location quotients (LQs) are a
5 useful tool to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses in employment opportunities for a
6 community. Comparing the prevalence of industries in Merrimac relative to these
7 industries in Essex County and Massachusetts shows which industries the Town’s
8 employers specialize in. LQs are concerned with the employment base of a town, as
9 opposed to the IQ which looks at the labor force of a town.

10
11 Merrimac industry groups with the highest LQs are “Public Administration”; “Other
12 Services (Except Public Administration)”; “Transportation and Warehousing, and
13 Utilities”; and “Retail Trade”. Public Administration has the highest LQ, at 4.36,
14 meaning that “Public Sector” jobs make up over four times more of the total jobs
15 available in Merrimac than this industry does in Massachusetts. “Transportation and
16 Warehousing, and Utilities,” and “Other Services (Except Public Administration)” also



1 have LQs of over 1.50, meaning they these industries are significantly more important to
 2 Merrimac’s local employment base than the state at large.
 3
 4 The calculation of LQs also allows for a comparison between the skills and industry
 5 experience of Merrimac’s residents, and the jobs available within the Town. Comparing
 6 these two quotients can help understand how well Merrimac is providing local
 7 employment opportunities for its residents, and local qualified employees for its
 8 businesses. Figure 4.5.5 shows the industries with high (>1.10) LQs and IQs. As this
 9 figure shows, there is a significant disconnect between the skills and industries Merrimac
 10 residents are employed in, and the employment opportunities available in Merrimac.
 11 While the “Retail,” “Transportation and Warehousing, and Utilities,” and “Other
 12 Services (except Public Administration)” are specialties of both Merrimac employers and
 13 residents, major industries of employment for Merrimac residents, like “Construction,”
 14 “Manufacturing,” and “Wholesale Trade” have very few jobs in Merrimac. Meanwhile,
 15 major industries within Merrimac, like “Public Administration,” and “Arts,
 16 Entertainment, and Recreation, and Accommodation and Food Services” do not have
 17 local labor to match their local scale.
 18



19
20

21 **ENTERPRISES AND EMPLOYERS**

22 The total number of jobs in Merrimac has remained stable since 2017.⁸⁹ However, the
 23 total number of businesses in town grew by 24 establishments, as shown in Table 4.5.7.
 24 This suggests an increase in small businesses employing fewer workers. The average
 25 Merrimac enterprise employed 4.3 employees in 2022, about half the number of

⁸⁹ Massachusetts Department of Economic Research Employment and Wages (ES-202) Data on Industry Employment 2022.

1 employees of the average county or state establishment.⁹⁰ From 2017 to 2022, their was a
 2 noticeable increase is Administrative and Waste Services employers and jobs, rising from
 3 just 7 employers employing a monthly average of 29 workers, to 16 employers
 4 employing 85 workers. This growth appears to be driven largely by a rise in the
 5 subgroup of companies offering services to buildings and dwellings, which comprise 10
 6 of the 16 employers, while no enterprises were reported under that category in 2017.
 7

Table 4.5.7: Number of Establishments by Industry in Merrimac 2021

NAICS	Description	No. of Establishments	Change since 2017	Average Workers per establishment
11	Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	-	-	-
21	Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	-	-	-
23	Construction	22	10%	3.1
31-33	Manufacturing	-	-	-
22	Utilities	-	-	-
42	Wholesale Trade	5	0%	1.2
44-45	Retail Trade	8	-11%	3.4
48-49	Transportation and Warehousing	6	20%	4.0
51	Information	5	-	2.8
52	Finance and Insurance	5	0%	2.8
53	Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	3	0%	5.7
54	Professional, and Technical Services	15	50%	2.1
55	Management of Companies and Enterprises	-	-	-
56	Administrative and Waste Services	16	129%	5.3
61	Educational Services	-	-	-
62	Health Care and Social Assistance	28	12%	7.0
71	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	-	-	-
72	Accommodation and Food Services	7	-13%	8.1
81	Other Services, Except Public Administration	11	10%	2.5
92	Public Administration	-	-	-
10	Total, All Industries	151	19%	5.7

Note: Due to the limited number of employers, the State of Massachusetts has excluded the number of establishments and average employment data for certain industries in Merrimac.
Source: State of Massachusetts Department of Economic Research Employment and Wages ES-202 Data on Industry Employment

8
 9 Merrimac’s employers tend to be smaller in scale. In 2022 no enterprise employed more
 10 than 100 employees, and only three employed 50 or more.⁹¹ Table 4.5.8 shows the 14
 11 largest employers in Merrimac in 2022. Town government and the regional school

⁹⁰ Massachusetts Department of Economic Research Employment and Wages (ES-202) Data on Industry Employment 2022.

⁹¹ Massachusetts Department of Economic Research ES-202 Employment and Wages Data 2022.



1 system play a significant role in employment. The largest employers in Merrimac are the
 2 public elementary schools, followed by the Town Fire and Water Department. The other
 3 largest employers come from a range of industries, including manufacturing,
 4 construction, retail, transportation, and information services.
 5

Table 4.5.8: Largest Employers in Merrimac 2022

Employer	Number of Employees	Industry
Dr Frederick N Sweetsir School	50-99	Education Services
Helen R Donaghue School	50-99	Education Services
James F Mullen Co Inc	50-99	Manufacturing
Freedom Pest Control	20-49	Construction
Kenzo Vending Co	20-49	Retail Trade
Merrimac Fire Dept*	20-49	Public Administration
North Shore Bank	20-49	Finance and Insurance
Parker-Hannifin Corp	20-49	Manufacturing
Timberlane Coach Co	20-49	Transportation and Warehousing
Value Innovation Partners Ltd	20-49	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services
VITAC	20-49	Information
Water Department Station	20-49	Public Administration
Westminster Woodworks	20-49	Manufacturing
<i>*This includes on-call firefighters who are paid per call.</i>		
<i>Source: Massachusetts Department of Economic Research ES-202 Employment and Wages Data 2022</i>		

6
 7 **TAX BASE**
 8 Merrimac has the second lowest per capita tax levy among nearby communities for
 9 Fiscal Year 2023, as seen at Figure 4.5.6. According to the Massachusetts Department of
 10 Revenue data shown at Table 4.5.9, 96.2 percent of Merrimac’s tax levy is from
 11 residential taxes, the second highest rate among its adjacent communities.
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Table 4.5.9: Tax Levy by Class in Merrimac 2013-2023

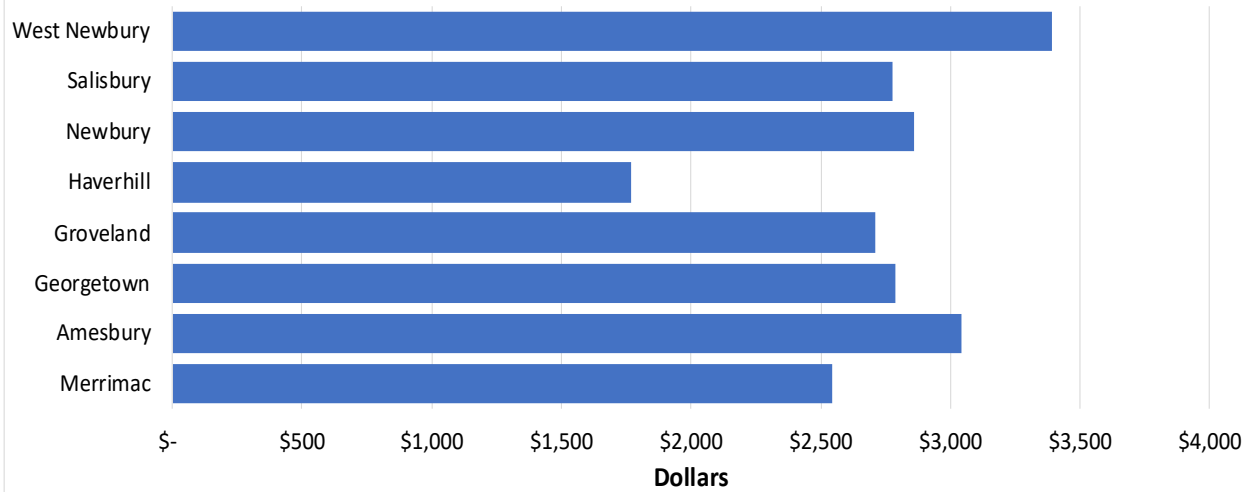
Fiscal Year	Residential	Commercial	Industrial	Personal Property	Total Tax Levy	R as Share	C/I/P as share
2024	17,430,080	363,411	151,996	174,457	18,119,943	96.19	3.81
2023	16,443,768	359,705	148,318	139,489	17,091,279	96.21	3.79
2022	15,758,483	372,701	141,131	162,512	16,434,827	95.88	4.12
2021	14,607,268	365,871	133,900	150,293	15,257,332	95.74	4.26
2020	13,033,790	326,053	122,427	131,771	13,614,041	95.74	4.26
2019	12,476,703	331,741	125,927	127,957	13,062,328	95.52	4.48
2018	11,926,749	325,326	118,012	121,358	12,491,445	95.48	4.52
2017	11,453,875	329,729	119,464	133,727	12,036,794	95.16	4.84
2016	10,875,157	333,270	118,846	132,543	11,459,816	94.90	5.10
2015	10,428,565	317,772	114,778	117,902	10,979,017	94.99	5.01
2014	10,046,312	311,393	114,943	123,160	10,595,808	94.81	5.19

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services Tax Levy by Class

1
2

Figure 7: Tax Levy Per Capita

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services DOR Databank Tax Levy by Class



3
4

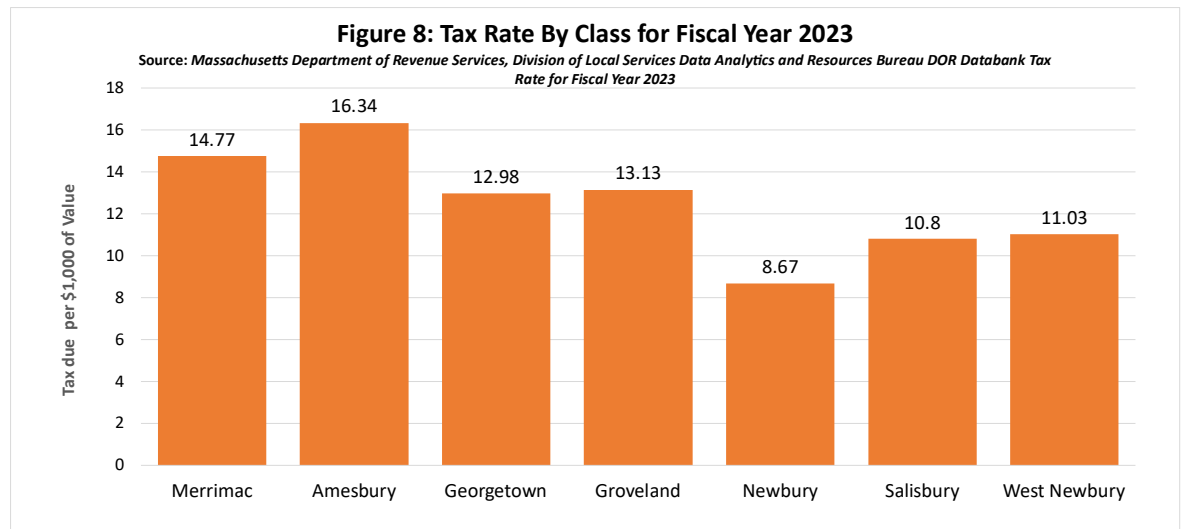
In Fiscal Year 2023, Merrimac’s total tax levy was \$17 million.⁹² The tax levy is how much actual income the town received from taxes in a given year, and Merrimac has the second lowest levy among its adjacent communities. However, Merrimac’s residential tax rate, how much is due in taxes for every dollar of property, is the second highest among its neighboring communities, and its Commercial, Industrial and Personal Property tax rates are the third highest. Under Merrimac’s current tax rate, \$14.77 of taxes is due for every \$1,000 of assessed value. Like most of the communities in its area,

11

⁹² : Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services DOR Databank, Tax Levy By Class.



1 Merrimac does not have a split tax system, and all forms of property are assessed at the
2 same rate.
3



4
5
6 Merrimac’s higher than average tax rates, and lower than average tax levy (the amount
7 the town receives is as taxes) is due to Merrimac’s low assessed property values. The
8 assessed value of a property is how much the town determines that piece of property is
9 worth. Merrimac has the lowest property values among its neighbors. Merrimac’s total
10 residential assessed value, the assessed value of all residential property in town, is 37
11 percent lower than the regional average, and its commercial, industrial and personal
12 property assessments are over 20 percent lower.⁹³ As with most residential communities,
13 Merrimac’s total assessed value derives from its residential properties, making up 96
14 percent of all assessed value in town.

16 Local Policies and Practices

17 ZONING

18 The majority of Merrimac’s land is zoned for residential purposes, and most commercial
19 uses are prohibited in residential areas. Merrimac’s residential zoning districts allow
20 limited commercial activity like home-based businesses and agricultural uses in some
21 zones. There are four zones in Merrimac intended for commercial and industrial uses
22 located along Route 110 and the northern side of Interstate 495. Most of these districts
23 are intended for small scale economic activity that provides goods and services to local
24 residents, and all impose physical size limits on some or all retail, commercial, industrial
25 and business uses. Despite the presence of several large undeveloped or underdeveloped
26 lots within these districts, their potential development is limited by the Zoning Bylaws’

⁹³ Massachusetts Department of Revenue Services, Division of Local Services Data Analytics DOR DataBank, Fiscal Year 2023.

1 constraints on the physical size of commercial and business uses, as well as the Bylaws'
2 focus on serving local needs through small and medium-sized businesses.

4 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING EFFORTS

5 Merrimac has no designated economic development position or department, and no
6 boards or committees primarily focus on economic development. This limits the Town's
7 ability to conduct economic development planning internally. The only current local
8 plan that addresses Economic Development is the 2002 Master Plan. The 2002 Master
9 Plan contained five policies for Economic Development, focused on:⁹⁴

- 10 1. Creating zoning districts and regulations to allow for transitional and
11 commercial development clusters along Route 110 suited for small business
12 activity;
- 13 2. Provide locations for light industrial, research and office development and
14 encourage these uses through regulations, tax incentives and marketing;
- 15 3. Adopt regulations and policies toward retaining and increasing live-and-work
16 space;
- 17 4. Discourage residential development adjacent to working farms; and
- 18 5. Establish a local economic development commission.

19
20 In addition to local Planning, Merrimac participates in regional planning efforts for the
21 greater Merrimack Valley. The Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC), the
22 state designated Regional Planning Agency serving the Merrimack Valley region, has
23 two plans related to economic development impacting the region:

- 24 • The *Merrimack Valley Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 2023-2028* was
25 completed in 2023 and comprises a number of recommendations and goals for
26 economic development in the Merrimack Valley⁹⁵.
- 27 • The *Merrimack Valley Priority Growth Strategy* identified two areas in Merrimac
28 determined to be priority development areas (PDAs). PDAs are areas the MVPC
29 determined would be appropriate for growth based on zoning, infrastructure,
30 access, limited environmental impacts and input from the community each PDA
31 is located in. The two PDA in Merrimac are⁹⁶:
 - 32 ○ Merrimac Square, defined as the 18-acre Village Center, as a PDA of
33 regional significance.
 - 34 ○ Merrimac Route 110, defined as the land east of Merrimac Square,
35 between Route 110 and I-495, as a PDA of local significance.

⁹⁴ Town of Merrimac, Community Opportunities Group, Inc, et al. (2002) *Merrimac Master Plan*.

⁹⁵ Merrimack Valley Regional Planning Commission (2023) *Merrimack Valley Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy*.

⁹⁶ Merrimack Valley Regional Planning Commission (2009, Updated 2015) *Merrimack Valley Priority Growth Strategy*, pp. 55-56.



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ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AREAS

Merrimac is part of the Northern Essex Regional Economic Target Area (ETA).⁹⁷ Merrimac’s inclusion in the ETA allows for the designation of Economic Opportunity Areas (EOA), which allow certain incentives to attract business. Under Massachusetts General law, an EOA may be a specific site or collection of parcels which constitute a “blighted open area”, “decadent area”, or “substandard area”, or has experienced the recent closure of a significant manufacturing center. EOAs are designated through an application to the State’s Economic Assistance Coordinating Council, who are responsible for determining if the area meets the criteria to be designated as an EOA. While Merrimac does not have any Economic Opportunity Areas, the Town’s inclusion within the Northern Essex ETA would allow Merrimac to apply for an EOA, should there be an area that meets the criteria.

LOCAL AND REGIONAL CAPACITY

Merrimac does not have an independent Chamber of Commerce, but there are several nearby chambers that provide services to Merrimack Valley businesses. The Merrimack Valley Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Haverhill Chamber of Commerce, and the Greater Newburyport Chamber of Commerce all service the region, and currently have, or previously had Merrimac businesses among their members.

MVPC works to provide regional planning for the Merrimack Valley, as well as planning and technical services to individual communities. MVPC also operates the Merrimack Valley Economic Development Corporation, serving as the state designated Regional Economic Development Organization (REDO) for the Merrimack Valley region. As the REDO for the Merrimack Valley, MVED manages a Revolving Loan Fund for business development and provides technical, advocacy and advertising services for local businesses and the region.

STATE AND REGIONAL INITIATIVES

Merrimac is a partner in the WeAreMerrimackValley regional marketing and economic development initiative. This Initiative, organized by MVPC and MVED seeks to support Merrimack Valley businesses through state and local advocacy, and to provide? data and technical services to local businesses.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ State of Massachusetts (2024) Economic Target Areas by Name. Accessed January 2024. <https://www.mass.gov/doc/alphabetic-listing-of-eta-municipalities/download>
⁹⁸ Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, We Are MV, About. Accessed January 2024. <https://wearemv.com/about-us/>

4.6 Transportation

Introduction

Merrimac's 2002 Master Plan outlined several goals, objectives, and strategies for improving traffic circulation, safety, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, and corridor improvements that still apply today. Merrimac has seen several changes since then, not only to the roadways but also to the town's population, which constitutes those who use the roads, streets, sidewalks, and trails. This section examines the state of transportation systems and networks that now exist in Merrimac, including how residents and visitors get around and what existing infrastructure supports different forms of transportation.

Merrimac's transportation system is essential for both local and regional travel. The town's transportation network primarily comprises roads designed for cars. Merrimac has over forty-eight miles of roadway, including state highways and local roads, providing connections both within Merrimac to connect its neighborhoods, Town Center, and commercial districts and outside of Merrimac to neighboring towns and cities of Salisbury, Amesbury, and Haverhill. Although the town's transportation network predominantly supports private vehicles, residents of Merrimac can access the MBTA Commuter Rail Station in either Haverhill or Newburyport via I-495 and Route 110 or by using Merrimack Valley Transit (MeVA).⁹⁹

Existing Conditions

TRAFFIC CIRCULATION

Commuting

Town residents frequently describe Merrimac as a bedroom community, meaning the town is largely residential, and most residents commute to work outside of town.¹⁰⁰ According to 2021 census estimates in Figure 4.6.1, the dominant form of transportation for employed residents in Merrimac is the use of private vehicles, either for driving alone or carpooling. An estimated 78.2 percent of employed residents drove alone. However, this estimate of residents who work in person rises to 91.2 percent, and to 95 percent if

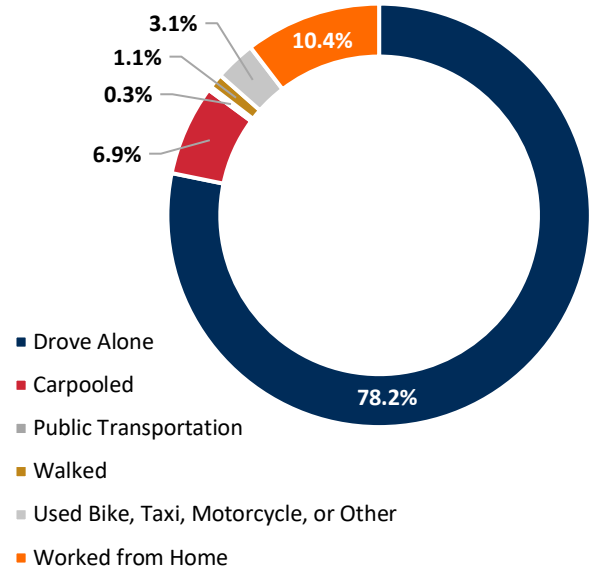
⁹⁹ Formerly Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority (MVRTA).

¹⁰⁰ Resident. Interview. By Barrett Planning Group. August 30, 2023.



1 including those who carpool with
 2 others. Additionally, 95 percent of
 3 employed residents have access to a
 4 private vehicle, and over 82 percent
 5 have access to two or more cars.
 6 Commuting characteristics have
 7 changed over time, but most notably
 8 due to the COVID-19 pandemic,
 9 which has impacted office work and
 10 significantly influenced commuting
 11 behavior. In 2020, Authorities
 12 encouraged social distancing
 13 measures to limit physical
 14 interactions and proximity with one
 15 another to reduce the spread of
 16 COVID-19 in the community.¹⁰¹
 17 Subsequently, remote work rose, but
 18 public transit ridership was
 19 impacted the most and declined
 20 dramatically since 2020. According to census estimates, 10.4 percent of employed
 21 residents of Merrimac worked from home in 2021, slightly up from 10.2 percent in 2019.
 22 Only 0.3 percent utilized public transportation in 2021, drastically less than 2.7 percent in
 23 2019 before the pandemic. There is no data provided for those who bike to work.

Figure 4.6.1 Modes of Commute
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American
 Community Survey Five-Year Estimates,
 2021



25 *Road Infrastructure*

26 The Town of Merrimac has a total of 48.7 miles of roads as recorded in the Massachusetts
 27 Department of Transportation’s (MassDOT) 2022 Road Inventory, shown in Table 4.6.1.
 28 The road miles refer to the number of centerline miles, which the report defines as the
 29 linear length of a road segment. For divided highways, such as I-495, only the length of
 30 one side of the roadway is counted to avoid redundancy. Lane miles refer to the total
 31 linear length of all travel lanes of a road segment, and do not include shoulders or
 32 auxiliary lanes. This is a closer measure of how much of the roads are available to
 33 accommodate vehicle trips and provides a better sense of the extent of the transportation
 34 network.

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¹⁰¹ Merrimac Police Department, “Town of Merrimac Urges Vigilance as Town Remains a High-Risk Community for COVID-19,” December 2020.

1
2

	Road Miles	Lane Miles
Interstate	2.5	15.2
Arterial	4.8	9.6
Collector	8.5	16.9
Local	32.9	63.1
Total	48.7	104.7

Source: MassDOT, Road Inventory, 2022.

3

4 I-495 is the town’s primary roadway to travel to Amesbury to the east and Haverhill to
5 the west. It connects to the north-south I-95 near the east side of Amesbury as well as the
6 north-south I-93 west of Lawrence to provide access to and from Boston.

7

8 [Arterials](#)

9 Arterial roads are the highest-capacity road classification underneath interstates and
10 limited-access freeways. They are designed for a high level of service between urban
11 centers and connect traffic from lower-capacity collector roads to the freeways. Route 110
12 serves as the principal local travel corridor running east to west, cutting through
13 Merrimac and intersecting with Broad, Liberty, Church, and School Streets at the Town
14 Center. Along the interstate, this route delivers traffic to and from nearby Amesbury and
15 Haverhill. Outside of Merrimac, the entire extent of Route 110 connects nearby
16 Massachusetts towns and cities: Lowell, Lawrence, Haverhill, Merrimac, Amesbury, and
17 Salisbury, to name a few. MassDOT considers most of Route 110 within Merrimac to be
18 in “good” condition following the Federal Highway Administration’s (FHWA) Present
19 Serviceability Rating (PSR).^{102, 103} FHWA defines road pavement as being in “good”
20 condition if it is smooth and sufficiently free of cracks and patches. Another significant
21 arterial, the Broad Street segment, links Route 110 to I-495, acting as both the entrance to
22 the town center for travelers arriving from I-495 and the exit from town for those
23 traveling outside of Merrimac via the interstate. These streets are under the town’s
24 jurisdiction, save for Route 110, a state-owned roadway.

25

26 [Collector roads](#)

27 Underneath arterials are collector roads, which fall under the town's jurisdiction and
28 connect local roads to arterials. They support lower traffic capacities but are more
29 accessible, as they usually run alongside development and properties where traffic can
30 enter and exit the roadway. According to MassDOT, collector roads include but are not

¹⁰² MassDOT, “2020 Pavement Condition.”
¹⁰³ Federal Highway Administration, “Present Serviceability Rating Computation from Reported Distresses,” March 2021.



1 limited to River Road by the river east of Locust Street, Church Street feeding traffic into
2 Merrimac Square, Bear Hill Road connecting Route 110 north to the New Hampshire
3 border, and Broad Street south of I-495 leading to the river.

4

5 [Local roads](#)

6 Local roads are the lowest road classification and provide the most access to deliver
7 traffic to collector roads and arterials. They grant direct access to residential properties,
8 so they have slower posted travel speeds. Over 67 percent of all road miles in town are
9 classified as local roads.

10

11 [Traffic Volumes](#)

12 The standard measure for traffic volume is known as the annual average daily traffic
13 (AADT). This is calculated by tracking the total number of vehicles traveling through a
14 road segment during a given year and dividing by 365.

15

16 Table 4.6.2 shows the annual average
17 daily traffic (AADT) volumes for the ten
18 busiest roads in Merrimac recorded by
19 MassDOT. The busiest corridor is I-495,
20 followed by Route 110, which includes
21 West and East Main Streets. The vast
22 majority of traffic occurring within town
23 is on I-495, with an AADT of over 60,000
24 vehicles per day.

25

26 Locally, most traffic occurs at the
27 intersection of East Main and Broad
28 Streets east of Merrimac Square. This
29 segment of East Main Street has an
30 AADT of over 8,000 vehicles per day, the
31 largest volume of traffic in town besides
32 the interstate. West Main Street
33 converging into Merrimac Square, and
34 Broad Street connecting East Main Street to I-495 has AADTs of over 7,000.

35

36 [Traffic Safety](#)

37 MassDOT's Crash Data covering 2013 through October 2023 documented 857 crashes in
38 Merrimac. It is important to note that this data only includes reported collisions and
39 provides no information for unreported crashes. In these reported crashes, 1,243 vehicles
40 were involved, and 236 people suffered injuries. Of those injuries, forty-six were serious,

Road Name	Peak AADT
Interstate 495	67,016
East Main Street	8,335
West Main Street	7,758
Broad Street	7,273
Church Street	3,550
River Road	3,366
Merrimac Street	2,765
Bear Hill Road	2,684
Highland Road	2,104
<i>Source: MassDOT</i>	

1 and eight were fatal.¹⁰⁴ This data also includes collisions involving pedestrians, cyclists,
2 and other non-motorized users of the road. In the ten-year period from 2013 to 2023, six
3 collisions involved pedestrians, and six other collisions involved cyclists. One of these
4 collisions resulted in a fatality on Bartlett Street between Broad and School Streets in July
5 2023.

6
7 The vast majority of these collisions occurred on I-495 and Route 110, with four fatal
8 injuries on I-495 and two fatalities on Route 110. The largest cluster of collisions is near
9 the town center in and around Merrimac Square’s roundabout.¹⁰⁵ No fatal injuries
10 resulted from those collisions. While I-495 is not under the town’s jurisdiction, Merrimac
11 Police and Fire Department respond to crashes that occur on the interstate.

12 13 PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

14 *Transit*

15 Merrimack Valley Transit (MeVa), formerly known as Merrimack Valley Regional
16 Transportation Authority (MVRTA), is the region’s public transit service provider. They
17 operate one bus line serving the Town of Merrimac. Route 17: “Haverhill-Salisbury
18 Beach via Amesbury” has inbound (towards Haverhill) and outbound (towards
19 Salisbury) stops along Route 110 and loops around Locust, Middle, and School Streets.
20 The line connects passengers to Salisbury, Amesbury, and Haverhill, where passengers
21 can also transfer to other MeVa lines to travel to other communities in the Merrimack
22 Valley region. On weekdays, Route 17 runs every hour, starting at 5:00 a.m. with the last
23 stop at 8:45 p.m., traveling inbound toward Haverhill. On Saturday, it runs every hour
24 between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. Route 17 does not operate on Sundays.

25
26 All local fixed routes and paratransit services are fare-free as of March 2022. This two-
27 year program is funded by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act
28 (CARES) and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).^{106,107}

29
30 Passengers can travel west to the MBTA Haverhill Station for the Haverhill Commuter
31 Rail Line or east to the Newburyport Station for the Newburyport/Rockport Commuter
32 Rail Line to reach Boston in approximately one hour. The one-way fare for the
33 Commuter Rail to Boston’s North Station is \$11.00 from Haverhill and \$12.25 from
34 Newburyport as of 2023. People with disabilities, 65 and older, middle and high school
35 students, and young adults (age 18-25) with low income are eligible for reduced fares.

¹⁰⁴ In this case, “serious” injury is when the victim is incapacitated but did not suffer a fatal injury.

¹⁰⁵ This data also includes collisions before the reconstruction of Merrimac Square from a 4-way intersection to a roundabout.

¹⁰⁶ Merrimack Valley Transit.

¹⁰⁷ Mass Transit, “MVRTA goes fare free March 2022.”

<https://www.masstransitmag.com/management/press-release/21249102/merrimack-valley-regional-transit-authority-mvrta-mvrta-goes-fare-free-march-2022>.



1 Children 11 years and younger, people who are legally blind, military personnel, police
2 and firefighters, and Department of Public Utilities employees are offered free service.¹⁰⁸

3

4 *Paratransit and ADA*

5 All MeVa buses are equipped with accessibility features and offer reasonable
6 accommodations for persons with disabilities as established by the Americans with
7 Disabilities Act (ADA). For people who are unable to use Route 17 or other fixed bus
8 routes, miniMeVa (formerly EZ Trans) paratransit service is available for people with
9 disabilities that prevent them from using the local fixed routes. Eligible passengers must
10 have disabilities that meet the definitions established by the ADA. Service is available
11 from 5:00 a.m. to 8 p.m. weekdays, and for service on weekends and holidays,
12 passengers can call to schedule in advance. Medi-MeVa (formerly Medi-Ride) offers
13 miniMeVa passengers free service to Boston hospitals and the Lahey Clinic in Peabody.

14

15 The Town of Merrimac's Council on Aging/Senior Center provides transportation to
16 medical appointments, grocery stores, the Senior Center, local hairdressers, and hospitals
17 for all adults. These services are free of charge but operate on suggested donations for
18 each ride.

19

20 BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

21 *Sidewalks and Paths*

22 There are over fourteen miles of sidewalks in town. One notable sidewalk improvement
23 project was completed recently in late 2015. The Town completed its Town Square
24 Construction Project for Merrimac Square after a 12-year-long process.^{109, 110} This
25 redesign reconstructed its previous offset four-way intersection to its current rotary
26 intersection for East and West Main Streets, Church Street, and School Street. This
27 project addressed traffic flow and safety issues and constructed 2,500 feet of ADA-
28 compliant sidewalks for pedestrians and users with disabilities. The Town continues to
29 explore opportunities to improve pedestrian networks by adding more miles of
30 sidewalks and implementing accessibility features such as curb cuts.

31

32 However, residents voiced concerns about the lack of safe pedestrian infrastructure
33 elsewhere in town. They referenced deteriorating and missing sidewalks further from
34 the center of town, particularly along River Road, where pedestrians and cyclists like to
35 travel for recreation and scenic views. Additionally, there is a lack of a pedestrian
36 network to provide public access to these scenic routes and connect residents to

¹⁰⁸ Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority.

¹⁰⁹ Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, "Active Transportation Plan," January 2015.

¹¹⁰ John Guilfoil Public Relations, "Merrimac Town Square Construction Project Nearing Completion," August 3, 2015. <https://jgpr.net/2015/08/03/merrimac-town-square-construction-project-nearing-completion/>.

1 important points of interest, such as institutions such as schools and public transit via
2 walking.

3
4 The Town’s Commission on Disabilities works to add and improve pedestrian
5 infrastructure in town. The Institute for Human Centered Design (IHCD) prepared an
6 *ADA Transition Plan* in September 2021 that outlines existing conditions for pedestrians
7 and makes recommendations for ADA compliance for buildings and sidewalks. An
8 estimated 11.2 percent of Merrimac residents have a disability.¹¹¹ These include
9 difficulties with hearing, vision, cognition, walking, self-care, and independence. Nearly
10 a quarter of residents aged 65 and over live with a disability. It is crucial to provide the
11 physical infrastructure that supports these populations, following town goals to foster a
12 safe, accessible, and equitable environment for all residents.

13 14 *Bicycle Network and Facilities*

15 There is a lack of bicycle infrastructure and connections in Merrimac. The only marked
16 and separated bicycle lanes in town are located along East Main, West Main, and Church
17 Streets immediately around Merrimac Square. On each of these streets, the bicycle lanes
18 span several hundred feet along both sides of the road. Further from the center, these
19 marked bicycle lanes merge into the vehicular travel lanes and become “sharrows,” or
20 marked travel lanes shared among motorists and cyclists. Sharrows are only marked on
21 West Main Street for approximately two thousand feet after the bicycle lanes. When the
22 lanes are not marked as sharrows, cyclists can still use the lane; however, missing
23 indications and paint markings can discourage users from cycling on these
24 transportation networks.

27 **Local Policies and Practices**

28 The Merrimack Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MVMPO) manages grant
29 funding and develops transportation plans for the Merrimack Valley region, including
30 the Town of Merrimac. MVMPO is made up of staff from the Merrimack Valley Planning
31 Commission (MVPC) and is the region’s transportation policy board. In late 2023, they
32 released Merrimack Valley Vision 2050 (MV Vision 2050), their metropolitan
33 transportation plan (MTP) that builds upon their 2020 MTP and encompasses other plans
34 to envision a safe, equitable, accessible, sustainable, and cost-effective multi-modal
35 transportation system for Merrimack Valley. It outlines several objectives and strategies
36 for implementing ideas to achieve these goals.¹¹²

¹¹¹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates. Table S1810.

¹¹² Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, “Merrimack Valley Vision 2050: Metropolitan Transportation Plan.”



1 The projects that are included in MV Vision 2050 are eligible to be funded by the
2 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The TIP is a capital plan that provides
3 federal funding for transportation projects, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, highway
4 safety, and other transportation-related projects over a five-year period. MVMPO
5 manages the TIP for the region. The Town of Merrimac currently has no project
6 approved by TIP in Federal Fiscal Years (FFY) 2024 to 2028 but has expressed interest in
7 TIP funding for four projects for which they have submitted applications: Mill Street
8 (\$2.07 million), Church Street (\$3 million), McLaren Trail (\$10 million), and Route 110
9 Reconstruction (\$43 million).^{113,114}

10
11 MVPC’s 2020 Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan
12 identifies unmet transportation needs for seniors and people with disabilities in the
13 Merrimack Valley region and identifies strategies for addressing those needs. This
14 Coordinated Plan is tied to the Federal Transit Administration’s (FTA) 5310 grant
15 program, allowing MeVa to receive federal funding to improve public transit
16 accessibility.¹¹⁵

17
18 Additionally, MVMPO first completed their Merrimack Valley Active Transportation
19 Plan (ATP), MV Moves, in 2015 and lays out a region-wide vision for bicycle and
20 pedestrian infrastructure improvements, including specific priorities for each
21 municipality. MVMPO updated this plan to inform and integrate into MV Vision 2050,
22 and began implementation in late 2023.¹¹⁶

23
24 MVPC also developed a Vision Zero Plan supported by the federal Safe Streets and
25 Roads for All (SS4A) grant program in 2023. The plan provides guidance towards a
26 future of zero traffic-related deaths and injuries, while improving safety, equity, and
27 mobility for all users.¹¹⁷

28
29

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Merrimack Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization, “Transportation Improvement Program: Federal Fiscal Years 2024-2028.”

¹¹⁵ Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, “Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan,” April 22, 2020.

¹¹⁶ Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, “MV Moves: Merrimack Valley Active Transportation Plan.”

¹¹⁷ Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, “Merrimack Valley Vision Zero.”

4.7 Community Facilities and Services

Introduction

Towns must provide public facilities and services to residents, and these reflect a community’s operational capacity and its priorities. Places where the community gathers, such as Town Hall, the Library, and the Senior Center/Council on Aging are spaces where the Town connects with and provides services to residents, and how those spaces are maintained and operated matter. This chapter discusses public water and sewer, electric light services, municipal buildings and facilities, public schools, and public safety. Beyond physical infrastructure, it also covers the Town’s administrative structure, tax base, and system of government.

Existing Conditions

TOWN BUILDINGS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

The town maintains a range of public facilities such as schools, the public library, service centers, and administrative buildings to serve the needs of its residents. The condition and functionality of these facilities vary based on factors like maintenance efforts, funding allocations, and community initiatives.

Table 4.7.1: Town Buildings and Facilities

Building	Address	Other Departments Housed
Town Hall	2 School St.	Highway Dept; Board of Assessors; Finance Dept; Town Accountant; Board of Health; Inspectional Services; Public Access Television; Town Clerk; Tax Collector
Fire Department	16 E. Main St.	Highway Department
Municipal Light Department	10 W. Main St.	
Police Department	2 Jana Way	
Public Library	86 W. Main St.	
Senior Center/Council on Aging	100 E. Main St.	
Water Department	4 School St.	
Sewer Department	50 Federal Way	

Source: townofmerrimac.com, accessed January 2024

Town Hall

Merrimac’s Town Hall is the main hub for local government. It houses most municipal departments, notably the Department of Public Works, Assessor’s Office, Town Clerk, and Select Board. Many public meetings are held there, and residents visit for their questions and concerns they have relating to the Town and its practices.



1 The Town Clerk maintains all the records for the town and is the records access officer
2 for the town. This includes maintaining a log of all requests for public records and all
3 the marriage, birth, and death certificates. The Town Clerk serves as the chief election
4 official for the town, which includes all the voting history records and everything that is
5 related to the elections. Current staffing is one full-time position and one-quarter time
6 position along with a once-per-week volunteer that assists with filing. The demands of
7 the Town Clerk position have increased in the past ten years with managing early
8 voting, mail in ballots, and the public records requests which are required by state law to
9 maintain in a log.

10

11 *Public Access Television*

12 Merrimac TV is a private nonprofit formed in 2007 and is overseen by the Board of
13 Selectmen. Funding for Merrimac TV comes entirely from a contract between Comcast
14 and the Town, where the Town receives 4.5 percent of Comcast's local gross revenues.¹¹⁸
15 It is charged with the responsibility of establishing procedures to facilitate and oversee
16 the availability of access channel resources to the residents of the Town. It provides
17 training on, and access to video production equipment and facilities as well as other
18 communication technologies, and channel/broadcast time on the local cable television
19 system. There are two full-time staff, a station manager and technical director.

20

21 *Department of Public Works*

22 The Department of Public Works (DPW) comprises the Water Department, Wastewater
23 Department, and Highway Department. The Highway Department is responsible for the
24 maintenance of roads as well as stormwater related issues. The DPW is under the
25 jurisdiction of the Board of Selectmen and is responsible for the management of public
26 works operations of the town including: the Highway Department, Parks and Recreation
27 Department, Solid Waste and Recycling, Wastewater Department, Water Department
28 and Inspectional Services.

29

30 *Solid Waste and Recycling*

31 Merrimac provides municipal trash collection for eligible residents. Multi-unit apartment
32 dwellings over 6 units, trailer park units, and private developments are not eligible for
33 trash pickup. A cost is applied at the rate of \$2.00 per bag, or \$4.00 for large
34 bags. Recycling collection does not require a bag and provides an incentive to recycle to
35 save on trash collection cost.

36

37 According to the 2022 Recycling and Solid Waste Survey, Merrimac serves 1,223
38 households for curbside trash collection and 1,895 households for bi-weekly curbside

¹¹⁸ Merrimac TV, About, Accessed January 2024. About (merrimactv.com)

1 recycling. The school district has a separate contract for trash and recycling from the
2 school facilities. The amount of trash collected in Merrimac in 2022, including materials
3 collected from residents and municipal buildings was 638 tons, which includes bulky
4 waste.¹¹⁹ Single stream recyclables for 2022 totaled 603 tons and yard waste 42 tons.
5 Merrimac does not host comprehensive household hazardous waste collection events or
6 provide any type of food waste service.

7
8 Fewer households are using municipal trash collection in 2022 than in 2012 or 2017 while
9 the number of households serviced by the town for recycling has remained about the
10 same for the past five years. Accordingly, the volume of recyclables has increased from
11 429 tons to 603 tons from 2017 to 2022, whereas the volume of trash has decreased
12 slightly. The town does not currently provide any type of food waste service or
13 household hazardous waste collection

15 *Inspectional Services*

16 The Inspectional Services Department is comprised of the Building Inspector and an
17 Administrative Coordinator, currently supported by a part-time planning consultant.
18 The department handles building and land use permitting, and provides staff support to
19 the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals, although both boards also have their
20 own administrative assistants. The department also provides electrical, plumbing and
21 gas, and mechanical inspections on a regular basis. The Building Inspector is charged
22 with enforcing compliance with the MA State Building Code and Merrimac's local
23 zoning bylaw.

24
25 In 2016 the Inspectional Services Department transitioned to an online permitting
26 system. The archival documents containing permits and maps/plans have been scanned
27 in and integrated into the Town's existing MIMAP Software making all permit history
28 easily accessible. Fiscal year 2022 permits included 17 commercial building permits and
29 266 residential building permits.

31 *Public Library*

32 The Merrimac Public Library is a member of the Merrimack Valley Library Consortium
33 (MVLC), an alliance of over 35 public libraries serving the Greater Merrimack Valley
34 region of Massachusetts. The library staff consists of the Library Director and a
35 coordinator for youth and adult services in addition to four other employees. Over 3,300
36 Merrimac residents have library cards including 304 new cards that were issued in
37 2022.¹²⁰ A number of projects enhanced the outdoor library grounds in 2022, including

¹¹⁹ Mass.gov, "Recycling & Solid Waste Data for Massachusetts Cities & Towns," 2022 Municipal Solid Waste & Recycling Survey Responses, accessed January 30, 2024. [Recycling & Solid Waste Data for Massachusetts Cities & Towns | Mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/recycling-solid-waste-data-for-massachusetts-cities-towns)

¹²⁰ Town of Merrimac 2022 Annual Report. Report of Library Board of Trustees.



1 the Story Walk that was installed as an Eagle Scout project; a Pollinator Garden
2 implemented in collaboration with students and teachers from Whittier Tech, the
3 Merrimac Garden Club, the Friends of the Library, and library staff; birdhouses in the
4 children’s garden were refurbished; and the Garden Club installed a “Gratitude Tree,” a
5 wooden tree-like sculpture.¹²¹

6
7 The library works to provide materials and programs for all ages and interests and has
8 made a conscious effort to diversify the collection and programming to ensure it is
9 inclusive and accessible. Other publicly accessible amenities include a meeting room,
10 copier, and fax machines.¹²²

11
12 *Senior Center and Council on Aging*

13 The mission of the Merrimac Council on Aging is “to provide services designed to
14 improve the quality of life of elders by assisting them to remain as physically mobile,
15 mentally alert, and socially active as possible. The COA advocates for older adults,
16 manages the resources needed to develop services, provides education for seniors and
17 their families regarding choices in their care and community services available to
18 them.”¹²³

19
20 Staff includes an executive director, program coordinator, food & nutrition director,
21 outreach & human services coordinator, transportation coordinator/van driver,
22 volunteer coordinator, kitchen chef, COA senior aide, custodian/van driver, volunteer
23 food pantry coordinator.¹²⁴ Transportation is provided through the Senior Center by
24 volunteers (Northern Essex Elder Transportation - NEET) as well as Van Drivers. The
25 Senior Center parking lot was repaved in 2002 with new lines and handicap accessible
26 spaces.

27
28 *Board of Health*

29 The Merrimac Board of Health is a three-member body responsible for local
30 administration of a wide variety of public health regulations, including Title V septic
31 system regulations, restaurant health inspections,

32
33 The Board of Health staff consists of a Public Health Agent, a part-time administrative
34 assistant, and a part-time Public Health Nurse. The Health Agent’s responsibilities
35 include inspections of housing, food establishments, wells, septic, and water complaints.
36 The administrative assistant carries out duties that include permits for food vendors,

¹²¹ Town of Merrimac 2022 Annual Report. Report of Library Director, Kelly Unsworth.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Town of Merrimac, “Senior Center/Council on Aging”, accessed January 30, 2024. Senior Center/
Council on Aging - Town of Merrimac, MA

¹²⁴ Town of Merrimac, “Senior Center/Council on Aging”, accessed January 30, 2024. Senior Center/
Council on Aging - Town of Merrimac, MA

1 septic permits, and licenses. The Public Health Nurse holds twice-monthly blood
2 pressure and health clinics aimed at seniors, oversees a Used Sharps Collection Program,
3 and keeps citizens up to date with current health information via a monthly Senior
4 Center newsletter column.

5
6 *Veterans' Services*

7 The Merrimac Department of Veterans' Services provides emergency financial assistance
8 to financially qualified veterans or their families in accordance with G.L. Chapter 115.
9 Any money expended to these veterans under Chapter 115 is returned to the Town by
10 the State at a rate of \$0.75 to the dollar expended.¹²⁵ In FY2022, approximately \$90,100
11 was expended to eligible Merrimac veterans and their families, of which \$67,575 will be
12 returned to the Town by the State of Massachusetts.

13
14 The department also assisted and secured various VA medical benefits for service and
15 non-service connected veterans. These medical benefits included short and long-term
16 medical treatments at the VA satellite Clinic in Haverhill and VA Hospitals in the
17 surrounding area. Another service provided by this department is assisting veterans
18 seeking benefits from the Social Security Agency.

19
20 *Public School Facilities*

21 Merrimac is part of the Pentucket Regional School District along with Groveland, and
22 West Newbury. The district includes four elementary schools, a middle school, and a
23 senior high school, shown in Table X.X. Two of these facilities, the Dr. Frederick N.
24 Sweetsir School (serving students Pre-K through second grade) and Helen R. Donaghue
25 School (grades 3 through 6), are located in Merrimac. The Middle School and High
26 School share a building centrally located in West Newbury, with administrative offices
27 housed in the Middle School. Most elementary school students attend a school in the
28 town where they live.¹²⁶ While some secondary age students attend the nearby
29 vocational school, the high school accommodates the majority of the district's secondary
30 age youth.

31
32 The schools within the district are overseen by a regional school committee comprised of
33 nine elected members, three from each town. Regular meetings occur once a month,
34 supplemented by monthly subcommittee meetings, all of which are public and posted on
35 the district's website. The school administration collaborates with the Merrimac
36 Commission of Disabilities to improve the schools and ensure Americans with
37 Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance. School administration also works with Merrimac
38 Police Department and Merrimac Fire and Safety to increase community collaboration
39 and support.

40
41

¹²⁵ Town of Merrimac 2022 Annual Report. Letter from Kevin Hunt, Director of Veterans Services.

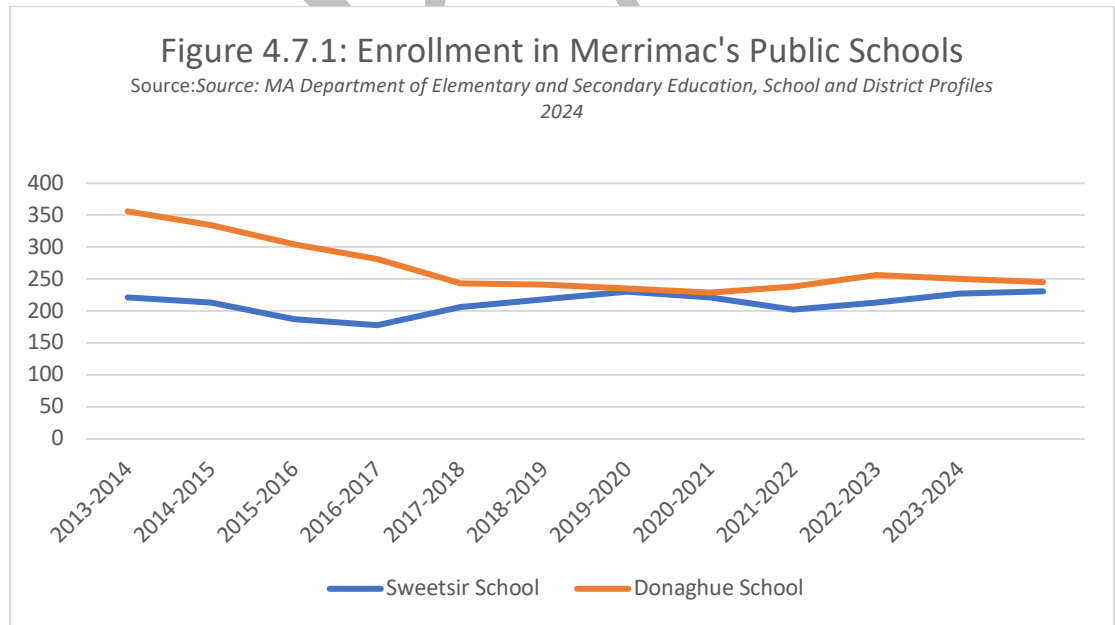
¹²⁶ Pentucket Regional School District, www.prsd.org.



Table 4.7.2: Public Schools, Pentucket Regional School District			
School	Address	Grades Served	Enrollment (2023-2024)
Dr. Frederick N. Sweetsir School	104 Church St., Merrimac	PreK-2	231
Helen R. Donaghue School	24 Union St., Merrimac	3-6	245
Dr John C Page School	694 Main St., West Newbury	PreK-6	326
Elmer S Bagnall	253 School St., Groveland	PreK-6	518
Pentucket Regional Middle School	24 Main St., West Newbury	7-8	331
Pentucket Regional Senior High School	24 Main St., West Newbury	9-12	574
Total District Enrollment:			2,225
<i>Source: MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School and District Profiles 2024</i>			

1
2
3
4
5
6
7

Figure 4.7.1 shows student enrollment trends for the two public schools located in Merrimac, the Sweetsir and Donaghue Schools. Over the last decade enrollment has fallen by about 30 percent at the Donaghue School and risen slightly at the Sweetsir School. Overall enrollment in the Pentucket Regional School District declined by about 22 percent over the same period.



8
9

1 [Pentucket Regional Middle & High Schools](#)

2 Combined school enrollment for the regional middle and high schools was 905 students
3 in 2023. The year prior, there were 314 total students from Merrimac attending both
4 schools. A new school building housing Pentucket Regional Middle and High Schools as
5 well as administrative offices was constructed in 2022, and students moved into the new
6 building starting in the 2023 school year. ¹²⁷

7
8 [Whittier Vocational Technical School](#)

9 Whittier Tech is a regional high school devoted to career technical education. Each year
10 the district prepares students for careers in 23 pathways in the fields of Arts and
11 Communication, Construction, Manufacturing, Service, Technology, and Transportation.
12 About 1,200 students study at Whittier, from Amesbury, Georgetown, Groveland,
13 Haverhill, Ipswich, Merrimac, Newbury, Newburyport, Rowley, Salisbury, and West
14 Newbury. Whittier also supports after-school and night programs offering training and
15 professional development to post-graduates and adults across the North Shore.

16
17 EMERGENCY SERVICES

18 [Fire](#)

19 The mission of the Merrimac Fire Department is to provide quality fire, rescue, and
20 emergency medical services to the public and promote customer satisfaction as well as
21 conduct fire safety programs to the students with the Merrimac schools, local groups,
22 and other interested organizations. In 1974, the Town purchased the Merrimac Fire
23 Station located at 16 East Main Street. Following extensive rehabilitation, the Merrimac
24 Police, Fire, and Highway Departments moved into the building in 1976. Originally
25 constructed in the early 1900s, as an old trolley car barn, it later underwent conversion to
26 a bus barn known as the Mass Northeastern Bus Lines after the era of the trolleys. In the
27 early 1960s, a construction company acquired the building to utilize it for housing and
28 repairing its equipment during the construction of Interstate 495. ¹²⁸ This transformation
29 of one building over time highlights the adaptive reuse of structures to meet the
30 changing needs of the community. The decision by the Town to purchase and
31 rehabilitate the building in 1974, further underscores the community's commitment to
32 preserving its history and repurposing valuable structures.

33
34 The Fire Station has undergone significant improvements in the last five years. The
35 Town, in collaboration with the Fire Department staff, has made considerable strides in
36 enhancing the working environment. This includes addressing issues such as mold,
37 mildew, and accumulated filth. More recently, the Town allocated funds to address roof
38 problems in the aging building. A couple years ago, the Town secured a Green

¹²⁷ Annual Town Report 2022, Town of Merrimac

¹²⁸ Merrimac Fire Department, "About", "Station History", accessed January 30, 2024. About - Merrimac Fire Department



1 Communities Grant for sustainable heating and air conditioning systems, particularly
2 targeting outdated or non-existent systems. The overall condition of the building
3 envelope requires attention, including reappointing and addressing sections of the
4 brick.¹²⁹

5
6 The Fire Department has six full-time employees including the Fire Chief and one part-
7 time administrative worker, but the bulk of the members (24) are on-call, meaning they
8 only are at the station when they are notified there is a need for help.¹³⁰ The department
9 has two fire engines, one ambulance, a fire rescue board, and two fire/EMT trucks.

10
11 Since the chief assumed his position, the call volume has skyrocketed, experiencing a
12 forty percent increase in the last year. In 2022, the Fire Department members responded
13 to 1,503 calls for aid, which was a 30 percent increase over the previous year's 1,192 calls
14 and a 50 percent increase in two years. The Fire Department staff has exceeded the
15 NFPA 1720 standard that states a department must have 10 members in 10 minutes on a
16 scene 80 percent of the time. Merrimac has met that standard 98 percent of the time
17 when staffed in-house and 81 percent of the time when unstaffed. The last six months of
18 2023 witnessed the highest number of calls ever experienced in any six-month period in
19 the history of the department, placing strain on staff capacity.¹³¹

20 21 *Police*

22 In Merrimac, the police department comprises nine full-time officers including the chief
23 and operates alongside a dispatch center. The dispatch setup includes a supervisor, three
24 full-time dispatchers, and several part-time dispatchers. The department operates from a
25 relatively new facility, constructed a couple of years ago through Town funding. The
26 Police Chief is supported by an administrative assistant who handles day-to-day tasks
27 such as managing payroll, bill payments, and fulfilling public records requests.

28
29 During COVID the Merrimac Police Department saw a decrease in calls for service. In
30 2022, the department experienced a seven percent increase in calls for service. This is
31 attributed to both an increase in officer-initiated activity and an increase in calls for
32 service.¹³²

33 The department's staffing approach differs from other departments, with officers
34 working 12-hour shifts due to the limited number of personnel. To ensure increased

129 Larry Fisher (Fire Chief, Town of Merrimac, MA), interview by , interview by Sarah Maren, Barrett Planning Group, August 30, 2023.

130 Town of Merrimac 2022 Annual Report. Letter written by Larry Fisher, Fire Chief, Emergency Management Director.

131 Larry Fisher (Fire Chief, Town of Merrimac, MA), interview by Sarah Maren, Barrett Planning Group, August 30, 2023.

132 Town of Merrimac 2022 Annual Report. Report of the Police Chief, Eric M. Shears.

1 coverage, the department operates as two separate entities, each overseen by a sergeant.
2 This arrangement aims to maintain a consistent availability of at least two offers to
3 respond to calls. Animal Control services are provided by the police department.

4

5 INFRASTRUCTURE AND UTILITIES

6 Energy and utilities play a critical role in Town operations and quality of life. Access to
7 sustainable, affordable energy in an emergency supports taxpayers and helps the Town
8 achieve its economic and environmental goals. As a state-designated Green Community,
9 Merrimac has received \$470,768 in numerous grants for funding energy conservation
10 measures throughout municipal facilities, since 2018. Investment in facilities, services,
11 and energy is costly but essential. Proper planning, management, and investment result
12 in long-term savings and significantly extend the usefulness of property and equipment.

13

14 *Water*

15 The Merrimac Water Department Pump Station was established in 1973 when six wells
16 were installed on Bear Hill Road and a 460,000-gallon water storage tank was also
17 constructed. The Water Plant on Wallace Way was built in 1991. Today, the Merrimac
18 Water Department maintains two groundwater supply (well water) sources at two
19 separate locations. The Wallace Way Wellfield, situated off East Main Street, operates
20 with an approved pumping rate of 240 gallons per minute (gpm). The Bear Hill
21 wellfields, located off Bear Hill Road on the Newton NH Line, has an approved
22 pumping rate of 280 gpm.¹³³

23

24 Water filtration is conducted to eliminate small particles and organisms such as
25 sediment, algae, and bacteria. The Town's distributed water consistently meets or
26 exceeds the primary drinking water guidelines and regulations set by the United States
27 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Massachusetts Department of
28 Environmental Protection (MassDEP). These tests include monthly evaluations for
29 bacterial contamination, while assessments for other contaminants are performed
30 annually or as determined by MassDEP's frequency requirements. All test results are
31 reported to MassDEP for monitoring and regular compliance.¹³⁴

32

33 In 2001, MassDEP approved a Zone II Delineation for the Bear Hill-Sargent's Pit Well,
34 estimating the area of contribution for the well. Merrimac's Zone II Delineation
35 comprises primarily forest and residential land uses, with a smaller portion dedicated to
36 agricultural activities. Under the MassDEP's Source Water Assessment and Protection
37 (SWAP) program, Zone II delineations were finalized in July 1999 and December 2000.

¹³³ Merrimac Water Department. 2022 Drinking Water Quality Report, Issued April 2023, 1. <https://townofmerrimac.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/2022-Water-Quality-Report.pdf>

¹³⁴ Merrimac Water Department. 2022 Drinking Water Quality Report, Issued April 2023, 1. [2022-Water-Quality-Report.pdf \(townofmerrimac.com\)](https://townofmerrimac.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/2022-Water-Quality-Report.pdf)



1 These SWAP reports evaluate the susceptibility of the public water supply to potential
2 contamination sources, with MassDEP assessing the Wells' susceptibility as moderate.¹³⁵
3 To protect the Town's water sources, gate access has been implemented, allowing entry
4 only to authorized personnel.

5
6 The Town continues its water meter replacement program to ensure both accurate
7 readings and safe water, streamlining quarterly readings to reduce required man hours.
8 A comprehensive hydrant inventory has been concluded, with the Town strategizing to
9 allocate funds for the replacement of rehabilitation of aging hydrants. In 2022, the Town
10 also had Underwater Solutions conduct a Sanitary and Security survey for the water
11 tanks.¹³⁶

12
13 Collaborating with the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), efforts are
14 underway to increase the water pumping capacity that was originally set in 1974.
15 Permits are being sought from DEP to commence the replacement of Bear Hill's 40+ year
16 old 8" wells, upgrading them to 12" wells. Notably, the Town finalized the water main
17 upgrade on East Main Street from 6" to 12" in coordination with the Crossing Way
18 development, boosting fire flow protection and water quality for areas east of Wallace
19 Way.¹³⁷ A project funded by American Recovery Protection Act (ARPA) grants
20 completed the Bear Hill Water Main upgrade from Sargent Farm to Abbey Road, from a
21 6" main to a 12" main.¹³⁸

22 23 *Public Sewer*

24 The Wastewater Department, a part of the DPW, maintains Merrimac's public sewer
25 system. In fiscal year 2022, the Town connected eleven new homes to its sewer system,
26 elevating the total number of connections to 2,115. The Wastewater Department
27 continues efforts to maintain compliance with its National Pollutant Discharge Permit.
28 These included collection system investigations aimed at identifying sources of inflow
29 and infiltration (I&I), repairing and eliminating I&I sources, conducting educational
30 public outreach programs, engineering assessments of new sewer connections and
31 extensions, testing of these extensions, and ongoing collection system mapping.¹³⁹
32 Additionally, a Facilities Plan for the Wastewater Treatment Facility was finalized in
33 2022. Due to the facility's age, the plan identified significant improvements crucial to

¹³⁵ Merrimac Water Department. 2022 Drinking Water Quality Report, Issued April 2023, 2.
<https://townofmerrimac.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/2022-Water-Quality-Report.pdf>

¹³⁶ Annual Report of the Merrimac Water Department for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30th, 2022. Robert Sinibaldi, Building Commissioner/Zoning Compliance Officer/DPW Director.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Merrimac Water Department. 2022 Drinking Water Quality Report, Issued April 2023, 6. [2022-Water-Quality-Report.pdf \(townofmerrimac.com\)](https://townofmerrimac.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/2022-Water-Quality-Report.pdf)

¹³⁹ Annual Report of the Merrimac Wastewater Department For Fiscal Year Ending June 30th, 2022. Robert Sinibaldi, Building Commissioner/Zoning Compliance Officer/DPW Director.

1 maintaining its proper operation and ensuring the facility’s capability to process and
2 treat the wastewater generated by the Town in the future. These improvements are
3 necessary to sustain the facility’s functionality and efficacy.
4

5 *Electric Light Service*

6 The Merrimac Municipal Light Department (MMLD) operates as a municipally owned
7 utility and has been in operation since 1904. Governed by a three-member elected Board
8 of Commissioners, the MMLD operates under the guidance of the General Manager,
9 holding public meetings on a monthly basis, and employs four linemen, two staffers, and
10 one intern.

11
12 The MMLD is a revenue generating entity that aims to maintain stable and affordable
13 electric rates keep up with and the maintenance, expansion, and modernization of the
14 electrical distribution system. During 2022, twenty-eight new electrical services were
15 added to the electric distribution system.¹⁴⁰ MMLD supplies power to 3,143 meters
16 throughout town, both commercial and residential, and operates streetlights.¹⁴¹ The
17 MMLD has two facilities: one at 10 West Main Street is the customer service center at 10
18 West Main Street and an indoor garage at 20 Federal Way.

19
20 MMLD receives 7.5 percent of power from the solar field in town. Massachusetts
21 requires that the power MMLD purchases for distribution is 50 percent carbon free by
22 2030. Energy conservation programs include providing rebates for qualified energy-
23 efficient appliances. In 2022, customers obtained \$6,000 in rebates. Another energy
24 conservation project was the conversion of rental streetlights to municipal-owned street
25 LED lights.
26

27 MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT & ADMINISTRATION

28 *Select Board*

29 The Merrimac Select Board, composed of three elected members serving three-year
30 terms, is the Town’s primary policy-making body, and addresses a diverse array of
31 issues pivotal to the Town’s development and provision of services. Responsibilities of
32 the Select Board include budgetary recommendations to the Annual Town Meeting,
33 approval of Town department reorganization, and oversight for matters in litigation.
34

35 *Town Meeting*

36 Like most Massachusetts towns, Merrimac uses an Open Town Meeting system,
37 allowing residents to vote directly on proposed articles. Town Meeting is held once
38 every spring, although the Town has the ability to hold additional Special Town

¹⁴⁰ Merrimac Municipal Light Department 2022 Annual Report, I . .

¹⁴¹ Interview with Mary Usovicz, General Manager of MMLC, August 30, 2023.



1 Meetings as needed The Select Board determine the contents of the Town Meeting
2 warrant, and the Town Moderator is responsible for running the meeting.

3

4 *Finance Department, Treasurer, and Finance Committee*

5 The Finance Department is vital to the Town’s daily operations, as it handles payroll,
6 processing contracts, preparing budgets, and more. The Town Accountant, appointed by
7 the Select Board, works in the Finance Department to maintain all municipal financial
8 records and ensure that the Town remains in compliance with federal and state
9 regulations.

10

11 In Merrimac, the Finance Director is also appointed the Treasurer and Town
12 Administrator, the person responsible for the day-to-day function of municipal
13 government. As head of the Finance Department, the Director’s responsibilities include
14 providing high quality financial, accounting, and administrative services, preparing the
15 annual Town Budget, keeping financial records, and setting procurement procedures.¹⁴²
16 The position’s administrative duties include advising the Select Board and Town
17 departments on personnel issues, coordinating between the various Town departments,
18 and implementation of local policy, including financial policy.

19

20 The Finance Committee votes on whether to formally recommend Town Meeting articles
21 related to the budgeting and expenditures, including the annual Town Budget itself. The
22 Committee is made up of nine members who are appointed by the Town Moderator.

23

24 *Town Accountant*

25 The Town Accountant oversees the Town’s financial records and day-to-day transaction
26 such as payroll and invoices from vendors. The Accountant keeps a detailed record of
27 expenditures and revenues to assist with local decision-making and compliance with
28 state regulations. The position also handles audits and is the custodian of the Town’s
29 contracts.

30

31 *Assessors Department and Board of Assessors*

32 The Assessors Department consists of a Principal Assessor and an Assistant Assessor
33 who are responsible for listing and valuing all real and personal property in Merrimac
34 based on “full and fair” cash value. The Assessors are legally required to revalue all
35 properties yearly, and undergo a state recertification audit once every five years.

36

37 The Board of Assessors is a three-member board elected directly by the public for three-
38 year terms. Their primary responsibility is to maintain an accurate and up-to-date record
39 of the assessed value of every property in Merrimac, which in turn determines the

¹⁴² Town of Merrimac, Finance Department, Accessed January 2024.

1 annual property tax levy. All property values are updated yearly. The Town uses Patriot
2 Properties as its online Assessors Records platform.

4 CAPITAL PLANNING PROCEDURES

5 The Capital Planning Committee is a five-member body including representatives from
6 the Finance Committee and Board of Selectmen, as well as the Finance Director as an *ex*
7 *officio* member. All departments are required to project their capital needs over the next
8 five years, and the Committee reviews all requests of over \$20,000. To determine
9 priority, they use the following criteria:

- 10
- 11 1. Necessary to respond to State or Federal mandates;
- 12 2. Public safety and/or health considerations; and
- 13 3. Operational necessity.

14

15 The Committee approved about \$480,000 in capital planning requests for fiscal year 2024.
16 Major projects that the Town is currently paying off debt from include the new police
17 station and the Pentucket Regional School District's Middle/High School project.¹⁴³

19 MUNICIPAL BUDGET (TAX LEVY, EXPENDITURES)

20 Merrimac's total tax revenue for fiscal year 2023 was about \$18.1 million, about 96
21 percent of which came from residential tax bills (see "Tax Base" discussion in Section 4.6
22 for a more detailed discussion on tax revenues).

23

24 Table 4.7.3 shows the Town's general expenditures for fiscal year 2023. Education
25 spending is the largest category by far, followed by public safety which includes funding
26 for both the police and fire departments. Over the past five years, Merrimac's annual
27 budget has increased by over \$4 million while the distribution of funds across the
28 categories in Table 4.7.3 has remained largely consistent.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Town of Merrimac, Mass., Report of the Capital Planning Committee FY2022

¹⁴⁴ Municipal Databank, MA Dept. of Revenue, Division of Local Services



Table 4.7.3: Merrimac Municipal Expenditures (Fiscal Year 2023)		
Spending Category	\$	% of expenditures
General Government	1,488,067	7.3%
Public Safety	2,456,694	12.0%
Education	11,969,913	58.5%
Public Works	1,444,498	7.1%
Human Services	446,379	2.2%
Culture & Recreation	328,672	1.6%
Fixed Costs	1,301,881	6.4%
Intergovernmental Assessments	115,027	0.6%
Debt Service	898,721	4.4%
Other	7,880	0.0%
Total	20,457,732	100.0%
<i>Source: Municipal Databank, MA Dept. of Revenue, Division of Local Services</i>		

1

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