Town of Merrimac Master Plan Update 2024

BARRETT
PLANNING GROUP LLC

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1. Introduction

The Town of Merrimac's last Master Plan was completed in 2002, and in 2023 the Town issued a request for proposals to update the plan for the first time in twenty-one years. Barrett Planning Group was selected to work on the project, and the Town convened a working group composed of resident volunteers and Town Staff to guide the planning process and work with the consultant team.

Throughout the yearlong planning process, the Town endeavored to keep residents informed and actively participating in crafting the plan. The working group and consultants hosted two in-person public meetings at Town Hall, one on November 15, 2023 and one on May 15, 2024. A survey was open to the public in January and February 2024, advertised on the Town's website, social media, and posted around in various locations around Merrimac.

Writing a Master Plan offers the people who live and work in a municipality the unique opportunity to think about the past and future of their community holistically, across many different topic areas at once. This Master Plan provides a snapshot of Merrimac as it was in 2023-2024 when the following sections were written and synthesizes community feedback to lay out a vision for the Town's future.

2. Vision & Goals

Merrimac is a welcoming, safe, and tight-knit community for families and residents of all ages and incomes Merrimac offers recreation, shopping, and entertainment opportunities for both residents and visitors. Merrimac provides utilities, infrastructure, education, and transparent local governance to enhance residents' lives. Merrimac values and protects its natural resources, scenic landscapes, and cultural history, including agricultural traditions.

Welcome to
MERRIMAC
Established in 1876

Goals

Land Use
Create zoning regulations that promote commercial growth and development of diversified housing types, focusing on redevelopment and prioritizing efficient and environmentally responsible use of land for new development.

Natural and Historic Resource Areas
Preserve Merrimac's natural landscapes, water bodies, sensitive habitats, and historic neighborhoods. Enact responsible local regulations to prepare for impacts of climate change.

Open Space and Recreation
Expand recreation opportunities on publicly owned land, maximize public access to open space areas including the Merrimack River, and work to preserve both new and traditional agricultural practices.

Housing
Provide affordable housing opportunities to meet local needs as well as the Town's obligations under state law. Continue to expand a diverse selection of housing types and preserve existing homes.

Economic Development
Work to retain Merrimac's local businesses and create vibrant commercial centers in Merrimac Square and along Route 110 to provide local retail and dining opportunities.

Transportation
Ensure safe and scenic road conditions, especially near major transit corridors Route 110 and I-495. Improve and expand non-automobile transit options to make walking and biking viable means to get across Merrimac.

Community Facilities and Services
Provide high-quality and transparent governance, maintain adequate public utilities, and build local community by offering cultural programming and events.

3. Key Issues

Local Business Retention

Participants in the 2024 Community Survey (see Appendix B) overwhelmingly supported local business growth, with many expressing frustration at the lack of local dining and retail options and concern that the community could lose existing businesses. The 2022 closure of Skip's Snack Bar, a 75-year-old restaurant and one of Merrimac's most iconic landmarks for visitors, has left residents feeling that their commercial base is in a precarious position.

Merrimac's zoning allows for an array of commercial uses along Route 110, including mixed-use developments in many areas. While the Town continues to see new businesses open their doors every year, commercial growth has been slow. Regional economic trends outside of the Town's control are likely the single greatest factor preventing more businesses from locating in Merrimac, but the Town should identify and remove any local regulatory barriers that do exist and make a proactive effort to attract and encourage commercial development. The Merrimack Valley Priority Growth Strategy plan identified barriers to increased commercial growth along Route 110 in Merrimac, including the need for water and sewer upgrades as well as zoning limiting allowed uses.[1]

Decline of Agriculture

Merrimac residents value the Town's agricultural traditions and generally want to see productive farmland preserved. Farms create and maintain an agrarian landscape and provide fresh produce and animal products to the local community. However, as with other types of small businesses, it has been difficult for small farms to remain economically viable in Merrimac. The American Community Survey estimated that in 2021 there were a negligible number of agricultural jobs in Merrimac, and

Staff Capacity

Several municipal departments including the police and finance departments reported difficulties hiring and maintaining full staff rosters. Merrimac's capacity to acquire and manage open space and key natural resource areas is hampered by limited resources and staffing constraints. Key staff members are stretched thin, with no reserve capacity to focus on critical tasks such as land acquisition and acquiring grant funds. While current staffing is inadequate in some areas, Merrimac is a small town that has a limited budget, limited space, and limited resources. The challenge for the Town is how to maintain the necessary staffing levels to provide quality services to residents while recognizing that a town of 7,000 people cannot maintain the robust staff capacity of a larger or wealthier community.

One way to bridge this gap is to share resources with other smaller communities in the region. Until recently, Merrimac shared a Conservation Agent with the Town of Newbury, and other shared positions like this could allow for departments to grow while minimizing costs.

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

Farmland in Merrimac

Affordable Housing & Chapter 40B

There is a high demand for housing in Merrimac, and much of this comes from outside of town. Wealthier homebuyers outside of Merrimac outcompete local residents and submit bids over the asking price of homes. This problem is further exacerbated by the increasing home prices over the years, making housing increasingly unattainable for Merrimac residents.

Home values are at an all-time high in 2023, with the median sales price of all homes at $550,000—more than double the median sales price in 2011.[2] Even the typical sales price of the 5th to 35th percentile value homes, considered "lower tier" homes by the Zillow Home Value Index, is about $440,000 in 2023.[3] In comparison, the estimated median household income in Merrimac was only $88,832.[4]

Additionally, Merrimac has only 5.32% of its housing stock on the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI). Because it is below the ten percent threshold established by Massachusetts' Chapter 40B statute, developers are granted higher degrees of authorization to build more housing in town, and Merrimac has less control over these developments. Although there is a significant number of mobile homes, these units do not count towards the SHI. As home prices are increasing, it is important to prioritize affordable housing to meet the housing needs of lower- and middle-income households.

Walkability and Accessibility

The lack of quality sidewalk infrastructure is a problem for many residents, especially seniors and people with mobility impairments. This issue is largely present further away from the center of town, where features, amenities, and services are spread farther apart and thus become more car-centric. Where there are sidewalks, some

2 Banker and Tradesman. "Town Stats." Accessed January 2024, https://bankerandtradesman.com/.
3 "Housing Data", Zillow, accessed January 2024, https://www.zillow.com/research/data/.
4 U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2021. Table S1903.

A bike lane in Merrimac Square

of them are deteriorating or are in poor condition, which limits the ease of use and accessibility for users who experience walking difficulties.

Additionally, the lack of a cohesive pedestrian network severely limits public access to popular destinations such as scenic routes along the Merrimac River for recreational purposes or even schools and public transit stops in town. Consequently, access and connections to essential destinations become much more limited for everyone.

Pedestrian and Traffic Safety

In the ten years between 2013 and 2023, there were 857 reported collisions, according to MassDOT's Crash Data.[5] The largest cluster of collisions is near the town center, where local traffic volume is the highest. Fortunately, there were no reported fatalities in this cluster; however, eight road fatalities occurred elsewhere in Merrimac. While most of these fatalities occurred on higher-volume roads like I-495 and Route 110, local roads pose safety issues, as well.

Residents pointed to the high occurrences of drivers speeding and the lack of dedicated bike lanes and sidewalks, which contribute to the perceived danger of the roads. In the ten-year period, thirteen traffic collisions involved pedestrians or cyclists, of which one resulted in a fatality on Bartlett Street in July 2023. Additionally, residents love to walk or bike along River Road, which is known for its scenic views of the Merrimac River. However, it has no continuous sidewalks or bike paths, and drivers often speed over the posted speed limit.

5 MassDOT, "Crash Data," 2013-2023.

Aging Labor Force

Merrimac's labor force is significantly older than the labor force in the state or county. Over one fifth of Merrimac's labor force is sixty or older. This means that many of Merrimac's labor force will be exiting the workforce in the next 5-10 years, and there are very few younger working to take their place. Only 25 percent of Merrimac's workforce is between the ages of 25 and 44, and only 11 percent is under the age of 25. As the current force retires, there will be fewer and fewer workers to replace them. This will likely lead to local businesses having difficulty finding workers or being forced to hire from further out locations.

Public Recreation Spaces

Many participants in community meetings and respondents to the community survey indicated a desire for more public outdoor recreation facilities such as parks, playgrounds, and sports fields. Interest in expanded activities at the Emery Street Field site and increased ability to access Lake Attitash were common.

Access to the Merrimack River is also limited, restricting recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike. Increasing public access to the river through the creation of a river walk and/or access for kayak and canoe launching in Town have been a ongoing areas of interest for residents.

Flooding and Water Quality

Chronic flooding presents a significant challenge in Merrimac, impacting both residential and natural areas. Notable areas of concern identified in the Town's 2020 Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) planning process include the residential areas around Lake Attitash and the Cobbler's Brook riparian corridor, along with associated wetlands. Other flood-prone areas are identified in Map 4.2.2. Moreover, the Town grapples with both point and nonpoint source pollution, threatening public

An aerial view of the Merrimack River

health, habitat, and natural resources. Limited town ownership of land within sensitive watershed areas complicates efforts to address these issues effectively.

Ecological Connections and Conservation

Approximately 60% of all the land in Merrimac is ecologically significant habitat. While the Town had been able to protect several, large connected tracts of this habitat land, connectivity between wildlife habitats in northern Merrimac and the Merrimack River remains inadequate for wildlife movement.[6] Additionally, Merrimac boasts a rich biodiversity, in part due to the presence of species that are endangered, threatened, or of special concern. However, this biodiversity is threatened by development, invasive species, pollution, and climate change. Like many other towns, Merrimac faces the challenge of balancing multiple needs like watershed protection, recreation, agriculture, conservation, and development.

MBTA Communities

Merrimac is required to comply with the new MBTA Communities law because it borders a community with commuter rail service: the City of Haverhill. Under the MBTA Communities Compliance Guidelines, Merrimac must adopt a zoning district (or districts) where multifamily development is allowed “as of right,” i.e., without the need for a discretionary special permit, at a density of at least 15 units per acre. This district must have the potential to produce at least 138 units, and the Town cannot require age restrictions for units in the district. As an “adjacent small town,” Merrimac does not have a minimum size that the district must exceed, and has until the end of 2025 to submit a compliance application to the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities.

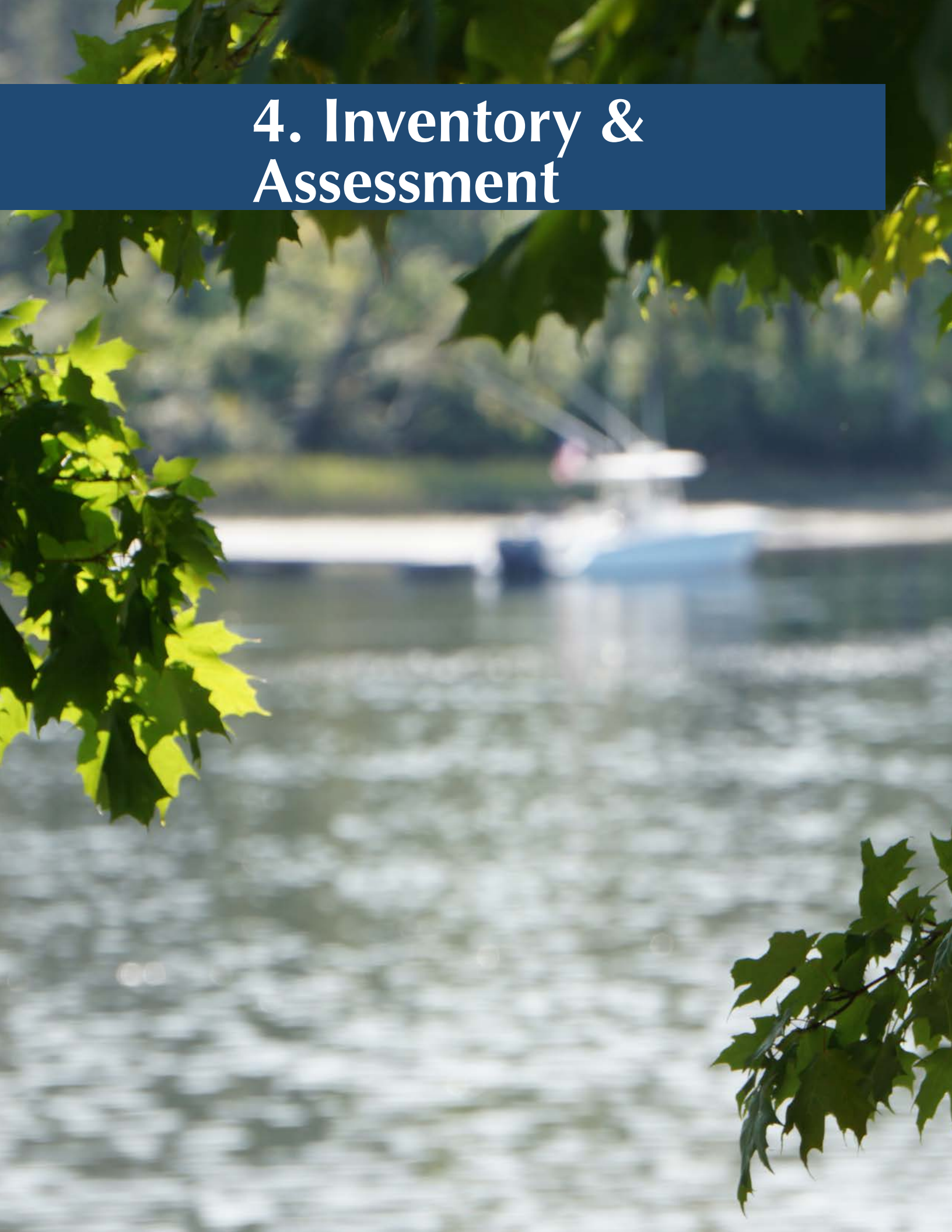
If Merrimac fails to comply, the Town will no longer be eligible for funds from three state grant programs - MassWorks, Housing Choice Initiative, and Local Capital Projects Fund – and it will have trouble competing for grants from several other programs, such as grants that help to pay for open space or stimulate downtown development. In March of 2023, the Office of the Attorney General released an advisory stating the opinion that municipalities are required to comply with the MBTA Communities law and may be subject to further legal consequences for failing to do so.

Water Supply

Town Staff have been working to ensure a long-term adequate supply of drinking water for Merrimac, especially in light of increasingly frequent water bans. In recent annual reports, the Merrimac Water Department has identified the need to replace the municipal wells at Bear Hill and to work with MassDEP to increase the Town’s allowable water pumping capacity, which was originally set in 1974.

6 Merrimac Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023.

4. Inventory & Assessment



4.1 Land Use

Introduction

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

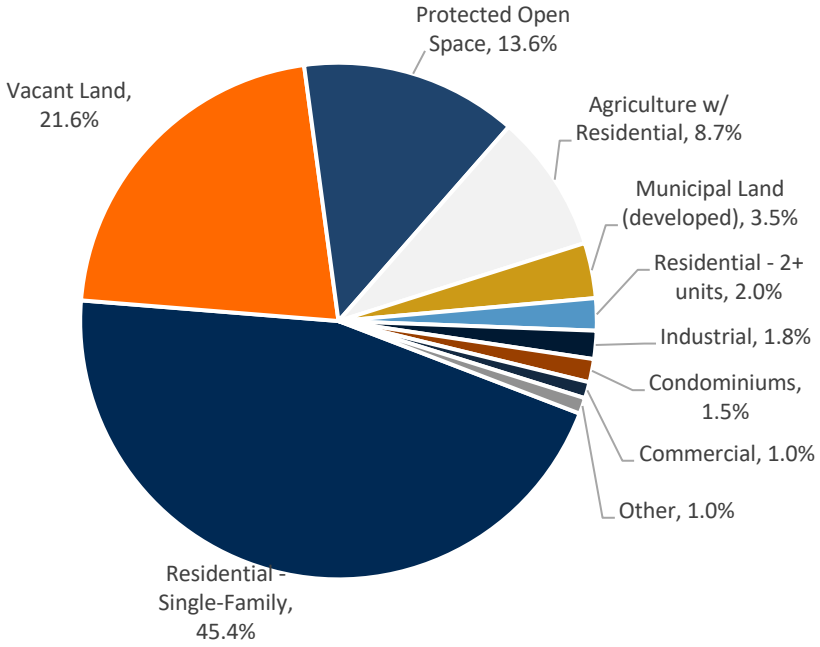
Existing Conditions

LAND USE PATTERNS

Map 4.1.1 shows the primary land use category for every tax parcel in Merrimac, according to the Town Assessors' records. Residential uses are the largest category, making up almost half the Town's land area (see Figure 4.1.1). Undeveloped parcels, including those that are permanently protected as open space, make up about one-third of Merrimac's area. The sections below discuss the history and current state of each major land use category.

Figure 4.1.1: Land Use by Parcel

Source: Merrimac Assessor's Data 2023



Residential Development

Single-family homes are the predominant land use in Merrimac, and their development can be divided into two major historic trends. First, there is the traditional pattern of denser housing on small lots near the village center of Merrimac Square and the historic neighborhood of Merrimacport along the bank of the Merrimack River. Most homes in these areas were constructed in the nineteenth century or earlier. Residential development in most areas of Merrimac was limited to scattered farmhouses until traditional suburban-style subdivisions became common in the late twentieth century. This second major trend has continued to the present day, with the 1980s and 90s being the most significant period of growth subdivision growth.

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

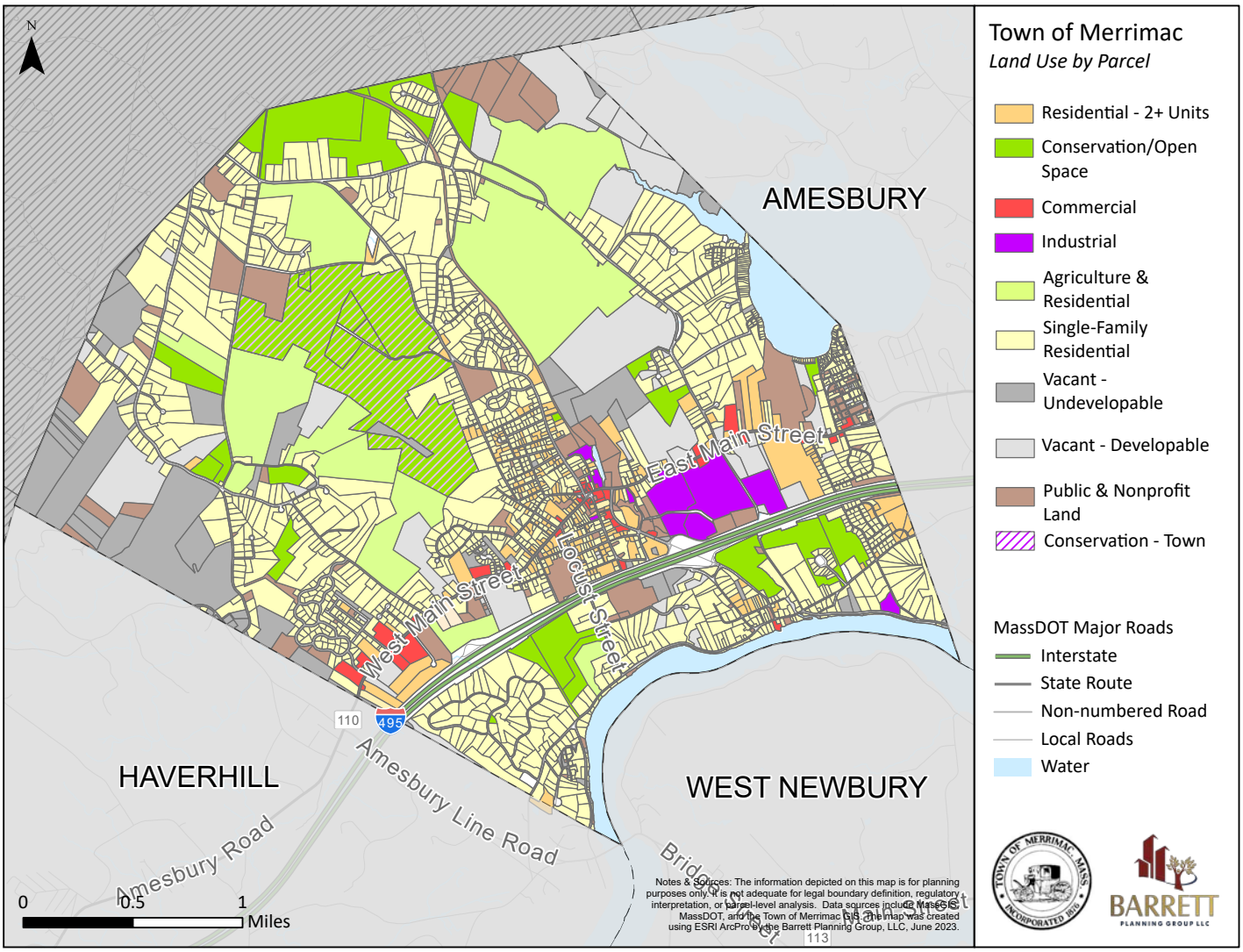
Commercial and Industrial Development
While Merrimac is a primarily residential Town with only about 3 percent of its area devoted to commercial or industrial uses, there is a long-standing local business community. Merrimac Square is characterized by nineteenth-century brick facades and ground-level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

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

Chapter 61 is a state program that offers tax relief to property owners in exchange for preserving open space for agriculture, forestry, or outdoor recreation. Unlike many other forms of protection, Chapter 61 status is not permanent and property owners may opt to remove their land from the program at any time. The municipality has the right of first refusal to purchase land leaving the program.

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

Vacant Land
Merrimac has over 1,000 acres of land classified as "vacant," meaning that it has not been developed or set aside for conservation purposes. Map 4.1.1 shows vacant land in gray, classified as either developable or undevelopable by the Board of Assessors. Note that land may be considered undevelopable due to factors such as local zoning regulations that may be subject to change. Over 490 acres of this vacant land is considered potentially developable, and is largely located in the eastern half of Town.



Municipal Land

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

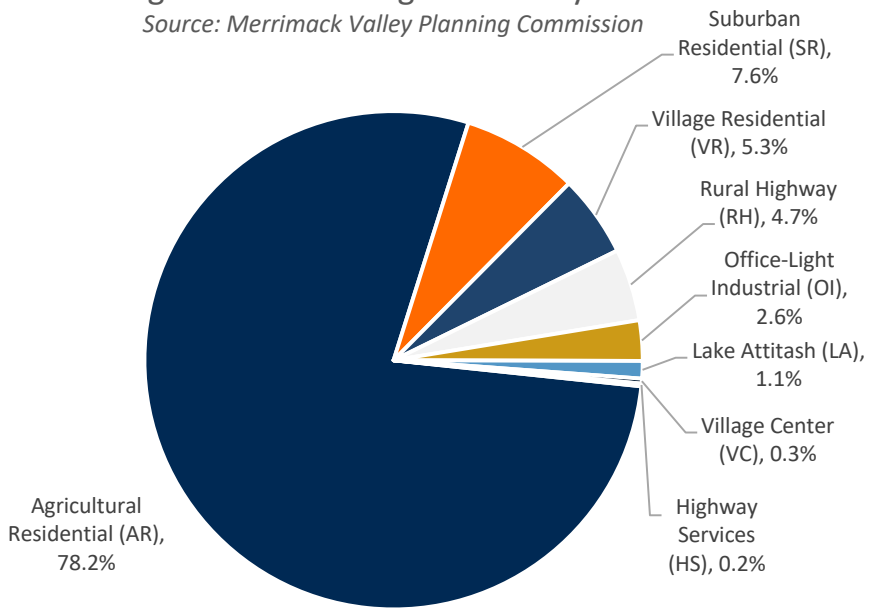
ZONING

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

Merrimac has eight zoning districts and four additional overlay districts. Figure 4.1.2 shows each district by the amount of land area it covers, while Table 4.1.1 lists basic dimensional regulations. Over 90 percent of the land in Merrimac is zoned for primarily residential uses.

Figure 4.1.2: Zoning Districts by Area

Source: Merrimack Valley Planning Commission



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 of development including site layout, building materials, and stormwater mitigation.

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."

The VR district allows for the greatest density of any residential district (see Table 4.1.1) and is primarily located near Merrimac Square. The Town's mobile home parks are also zoned VR. This district allows a more diverse range of housing options than the other residential districts. The zoning bylaw states that areas zoned VR have existing infrastructure and services that can accommodate denser development. Duplexes are allowed by right, and multifamily development is allowed via a special permit at a density of 8 to 10 units per acre

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

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

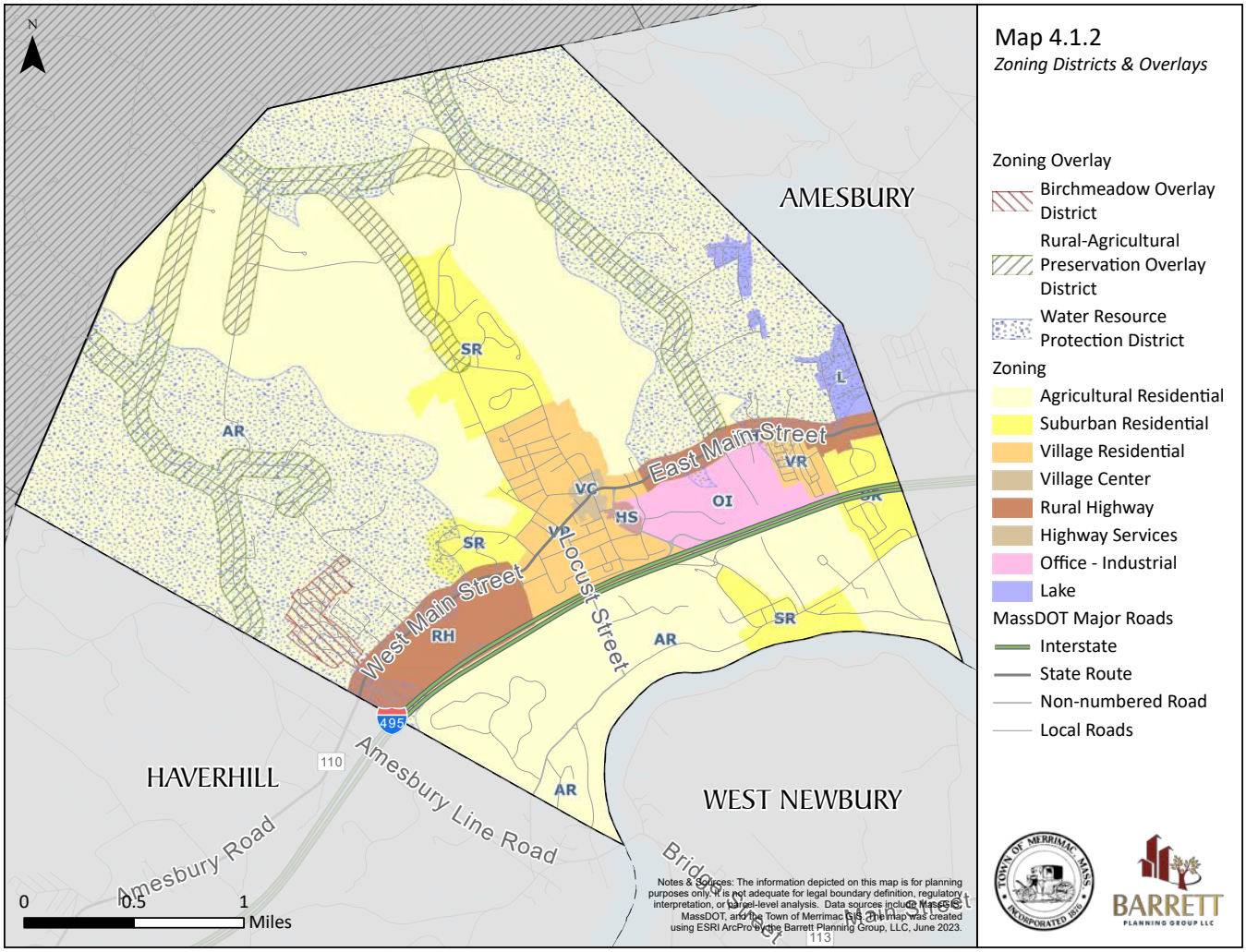
Suburban Residential (SR)
Purpose: to "recognize and reinforce the provision of established single-family neighborhoods near schools, the Town center, Route 110 and other appropriate locations."

The SR District is comprised of three areas with substantial existing suburban development, as well as the historic Merrimacport area (see Map 4.1.2 Zoning Districts). Compared to the VR district, the SR district encourages homes on larger lots (at least one acre) with larger front yards. Single-family homes are the primary type of development, although homes in existence for at least ten years may be converted to a two-family structure with a special permit. Accessory dwelling units may also be permitted in a single-family home (see "Accessory Dwelling Units" below).

Table 4.1.1: 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	

**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.*
***50-foot side setback when abutting a residential district*
**** Max. front setback of 40 feet*
†May be increased up to 55 feet by special permit
Source: Merrimac Zoning Bylaw, revised 2020



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

Agricultural Residential (AR)
Purpose: to" preserve the Town's rural character and scenic landscapes, encourage farming, provide for residential uses appropriate to a rural setting, and protect open space."

The AR district is Merrimac's largest zoning district by far, covering nearly 80 percent of the Town in low-density traditional agricultural areas. Most land in this district is undisturbed open space, agricultural land, or single-family homes on large (at least two acres) lots. The basic residential and agricultural uses allowed in the SR district are also allowed here, with the addition of some more intensive agricultural activities like wood lots and mills. There are some more specialized forms of residential development allowed here as well: areas near major rural roads allow small-scale cluster development (see "Rural Agricultural Preservation Overlay District" Table 4.1.2) and Open Space-Residential Development and Assisted Living developments are allowed by special permit (see "Other Zoning Regulations" below).

Design standards aim to protect historic structures and scenic views from the road by minimizing new curb cuts, and ensure that new building designs match the

area's rural character. A reduction of frontage requirements down to 50 feet may be allowed to help preserve the character of scenic roads.

Lake Attitash (LA)
Purpose: "to enable property owners to make minor alterations to their homes, and to foster new and infill development… cognizant of the history of the district's very small lot development pattern."

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

Commercial & Industrial Districts
Village Center (VC)
Purpose: "…to preserve and enhance the historic built form of Merrimac Square, develop and sustain a vital local economy… and provide a village that encourages people to live and work in the community."

The VC district is designed to facilitate the flexible reuse and redevelopment of historic properties in and around Merrimac Square. Dimensional standards are extremely flexible to maintain the existing dense development patterns that predate the adoption of modern zoning regulations. A mix of residential and commercial uses are allowed here, including retail, professional and personal services, and hospitality uses. Mixed-use development is allowed in the form of dwelling units above ground floor retail and live-work spaces. These uses are usually allowed by right, although some retail uses exceeding 2,500 gross square feet require a special permit. Age-restricted (55 plus) multifamily development may also be allowed by special permit at a density of up to nine units per lot.

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

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

Rural Highway (RH)
Purpose: "…to encourage Route 110 to develop in a manner consistent with the visual character of the community, strengthen and stabilize the Town's tax base, and foster a wide range of commercial uses."

Rural Highway is the primary zoning district for the non-residential parts of Route 110, to both the east and west of Merrimac Square. The RH district allows a wide range of commercial uses by right in buildings of below 25,000 square feet, including: retail, convenience stores, professional offices, restaurants, and grocery stores. Projects larger than 25,000 square feet require a special permit. RH also allows

Jana Way, a mixed-use development in the RH zone with both commercial buildings (foreground) and condominiums (background).

multifamily housing for adults aged 55 and up, and mixed commercial and residential development. Mixed-use developments may take the form of separate multifamily and commercial buildings on the same lot, or buildings with first-floor commercial and residential units above, although the latter is "strongly preferred." Mixed-use development must be comprised of at least 40 percent commercial space and can have a residential density of up to six units per acre.

Design standards aim to create a pedestrian-oriented commercial corridor and "enhance visual character" by creating varied and visually interesting facades with varied heights and massing.

Highway Services (HS)
Purpose: to "manage traffic flows on Broad Street between I-495 and Route 110, provide goods and services that serve local and nonlocal customers, enhance the Town's tax base, [and] foster a wide range of commercial uses."

The HS District is a small commercial area on Broad Street located just off of Route 495 exit 115. While the district has a few restaurants (Osaka Asian Bistro and a Dunkin' location), much of the area is taken up by the Cobbler's Brook Condominiums.[7] The district is designed to create a compact commercial service area for travelers on I-495 that can host local businesses. Small-scale retail, offices, and hospitality uses are all allowed by right, and restaurants and auto service establishments are allowed by special permit.

7 Cobbler's Brook Condominiums were permitted through the Comprehensive Permit process (also known as Chapter 40B) and were able to override some local zoning provisions.

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

Office-Light Industrial (OI)
Purpose: to ”encourage high-quality industrial and office developments that make a positive aesthetic and economic contribution to the community.”

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

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

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

Overlay Districts
Overlay Districts are drawn on top of the underlying zoning districts, and the provisions of the overlay apply in addition to those of the primary district. Merrimac has four overlays, summarized in Table 4.1.2: two focused on the protection of sensitive resource areas and two on specialized residential development.

Table 4.1.2: Summary of Merrimac Overlay Districts

District Name	Purpose Statement (from zoning bylaw)	Description
Rural Agricultural Preservation Overlay District (RA)	*“[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.”*	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)	*“[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”*	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)	*“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.”*	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)	*“[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.”*	Same basic residential uses allowed as in the SR district.

Source: Merrimac Zoning Bylaw, revised 2020

Other Zoning Regulations

Site Plan Review

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

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

Small-Area Cluster Development (SACD)

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

Open Space Residential Development (OSRD)

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

Assisted Living and Elderly Housing

Merrimac has several provisions allowing the creation of age-restricted residential developments. Assisted Living developments provide personal services and care to older adult residents while Elderly Housing refers to a multifamily development with occupancy restricted to residents aged 55 or older. Assisted Living projects of up to 150 units are allowed by special permit in the AR and RH districts, and Elderly Housing developments at densities of up to 6 units per acre are allowed by special permit in the VC, VR, and RH districts.

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU)

An ADU is a smaller, secondary dwelling that a homeowner may add to an existing single-family home. Merrimac adopted new, more flexible ADU regulations in 2024. In Merrimac, ADUs may be located fully within the existing building or as a separate detached structure, and cannot exceed 900 square feet in area. ADUs are allowed by right in every district where single-family development is allowed, although administrative site plan review by the Planning Board is required.

Single-Family Conversions

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

Re-Use of Municipal Building or Hazardous Material Site

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

Parking

Parking requirements impact land use decisions because the decrease the amount of land available for structures and open space while increasing impervious surfaces. The land required for parking can affect the feasibility of projects, especially larger ones that would require many parking spaces. Two spaces per dwelling unit are required for most residential uses, with the only exceptions being studio and one-bedroom units in multifamily housing developments (1 and 1.5 spaces per unit, respectively) and units that are restricted for occupancy by adults aged 55 or older (1.5 spaces per unit). Parking requirements for commercial and industrial are based on the amount of gross floor area in a building, from four spaces per 1,000 square feet for retail uses to one space per 1,000 square feet for industrial uses.

Local Policies and Practices

LOCAL CAPACITY

Special permit granting authority is split between the two main land use boards, the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals. Each board has its own administrative assistant and additional staff support for planning and zoning matters is provided by the Inspectional Services Department, comprised of the Building Commissioner and an Administrative Coordinator. The Town also employs the services of a third-party planning consultant to act as its Town Planner.

Planning Board (PB)

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

Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA)

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

Building Commissioner

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

MERRIMAC TOWN HALL

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.[8]

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. [9]

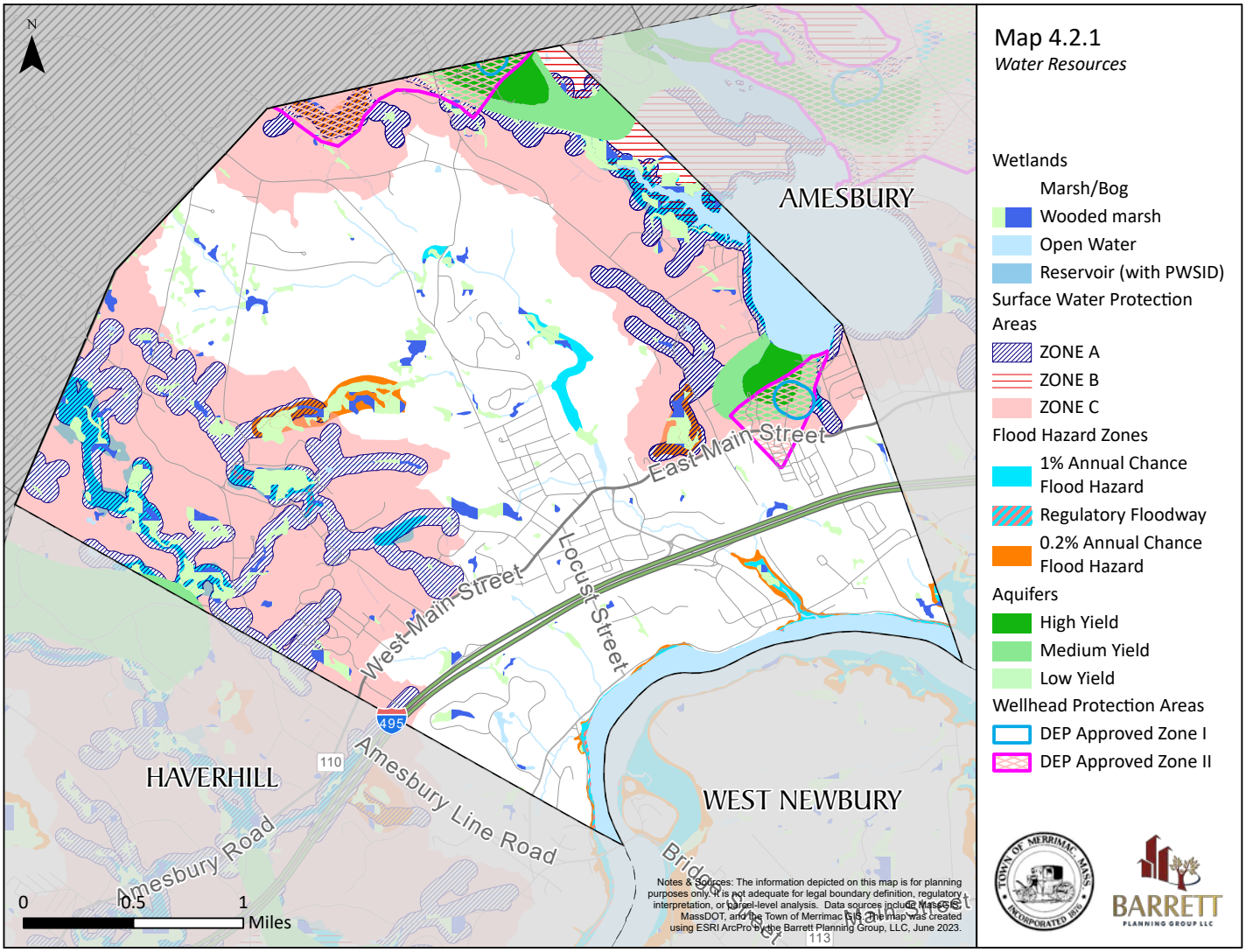
WATER RESOURCES

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 watershed affect the drinking water and habitat of the people and wildlife in other municipalities. Since Merrimac does not have the legal authority to regulate activities throughout the watershed, the town's water resources are vulnerable to decisions made in other municipalities.[10]

Among Merrimac's most important natural assets are its open water resources. Map 4.2.1 displays these water resources along with the Town's wetlands and aquifers. Perhaps the most critical water body in Town is the Merrimack River, which runs along the entire southern edge of Town forming the boundary with West Newbury. Not only is the river a crucial environmental, recreational, and aesthetic resource, but it has also

8 Town of Merrimac, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023, 18-19.
9 Town of Merrimac, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023, 18.
10 Town of Merrimac, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023, 19.



played a decisive role in the town's history and that of the greater Merrimack Valley. [11]

Extensive development has occurred along the banks of the river, and there is very little buildable land left on the riverfront. There is limited public access to the river in Merrimac however, as most of the riverfront land is privately owned. While residents may access the river at Carey Park and the Locust St. landing for passive recreation, the closest public boat ramps are in Amesbury and West Newbury.[12] While water quality in the river is generally good enough to support fishing and recreation[13], it is threatened by pollution from combined sewer overflows and other sources. As a result, portions of the Merrimack River, including the section running through Merrimac, are classified under the Clean Water Act as Category 5, requiring total maximum daily loads (TMDLs). 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. Communities decide through Comprehensive Wastewater Management Planning (CWMP) how best to implement the TMDL to achieve the desired water quality goals.

11 Town of Merrimac, Master Plan, 2002, 2.20.
12 Town of Merrimac, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023, 19.
13 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.

The section in Town requires a TMDL due to Enterococcus and Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in fish tissue.[14]

Merrimac's secondary waterways include numerous perennial streams, brooks, and ponds. The largest of these are the East Meadow River and Cobbler's Brook, which run into the Merrimack River, and the Back River, which runs into Lake Attitash. The shoreline of Cobbler's Brook is extensively developed with residential uses, light manufacturing, agricultural uses, road crossings and culverts, the McLaren Trail, and the former municipal landfill.[15] Stormwater and road runoff threaten the water quality of the brook, which is classified as a Category 5 impaired waterway due to debris, dissolved oxygen, and warm temperatures.[16] Smaller ponds are scattered throughout town, including Neal Pond on the border with Haverhill and Sargent Millpond and Crane Pond in the northeastern corner of Town (the remainder are mostly unnamed).

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

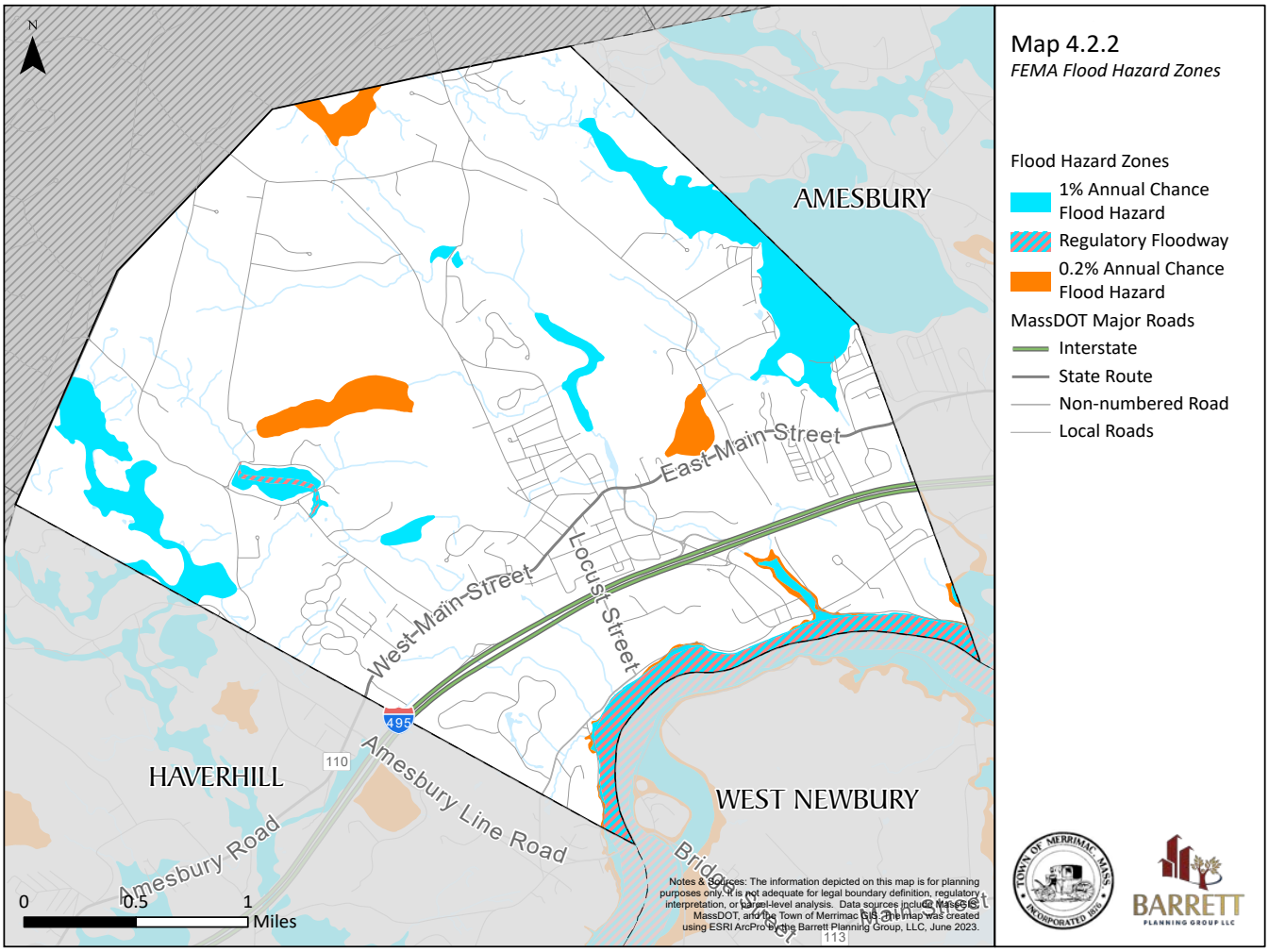
Intensive shoreline development and extensive public use have contributed to declining water quality at Lake Attitash. The lake has experienced frequent cyanobacteria blooms, due to excessive phosphorus, and has a TMDL for harmful algal blooms.[18] Non-point source pollutants, such as lawn and agricultural fertilizer and stormwater run-off, are the likely causes of this excessive nutrient loading.[19] The Merrimac Board of Health monitors water quality in Lake Attitash to ensure the health and safety of swimmers. During the summer, water samples are taken and tested for bacteriological quality and the presence of E. coli.

Amesbury occupies more than 50 percent of the shoreline and relies on Lake Attitash as a backup source of drinking water. Amesbury therefore manages Lake Attitash in accordance with a Management Plan prepared by Camp Dresser and McKee (1999). To maintain adequate drinking water supply and to control the water table, Amesbury controls the height of the water in the Lake. The management plan also includes provisions to control run-off and kill new plant growth.[20]

Aquifers and Drinking Water

Merrimac operates two groundwater supply wells that draw from underground aquifers (see Map 4.2.2). There are approximately 250 acres of medium and high yield aquifers in the Town located at three sites: Bear Hill Road in northeast Merrimac, south of Lake Attitash on East Main Street, and Neal's Pond on the Haverhill border.[21]

14 Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, *Final Massachusetts Integrated List of Waters for the Clean Water Act 2022 Reporting Cycle*, 2023.
15 Town of Merrimac, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023, 20.
16 Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, Final Massachusetts Integrated List of Waters for the Clean Water Act 2022 Reporting Cycle, 2023.
17 Town of Merrimac, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023, 21.
18 Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, Final Massachusetts Integrated List of Waters for the Clean Water Act 2022 Reporting Cycle, 2023.
19 Town of Merrimac, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023, 21.
20 Town of Merrimac, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023, 21.
21 Town of Merrimac, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023, 22.



To protect the drinking water supply, Merrimac created a Water Resource Protection District covering both groundwater resources (the area underneath the ground where water is found) and surface water resources (the area of the aquifer contributing water to wells under the most severe pumping and recharge conditions anticipated). The district was developed because Merrimac and the city of Haverhill rely on Merrimac's groundwater resources for their drinking water supplies, and the town of Amesbury relies on surface water from Merrimac (Lake Attitash) for its drinking water.[22]

Flood Areas

In Merrimac, 100-year flood zones extend along the entire Merrimack River riparian corridor and the shoreline of Lake Attitash (Map 4.2.2). Other large flood hazard areas include the Cobbler's Brook riparian corridor and the associated wetlands located to the east of the corridor. Flooding is a recurring problem for residents living near these waterways, exacerbated by vegetation and tree removal along the shoreline and extensive impervious surfaces.

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

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

Wetlands

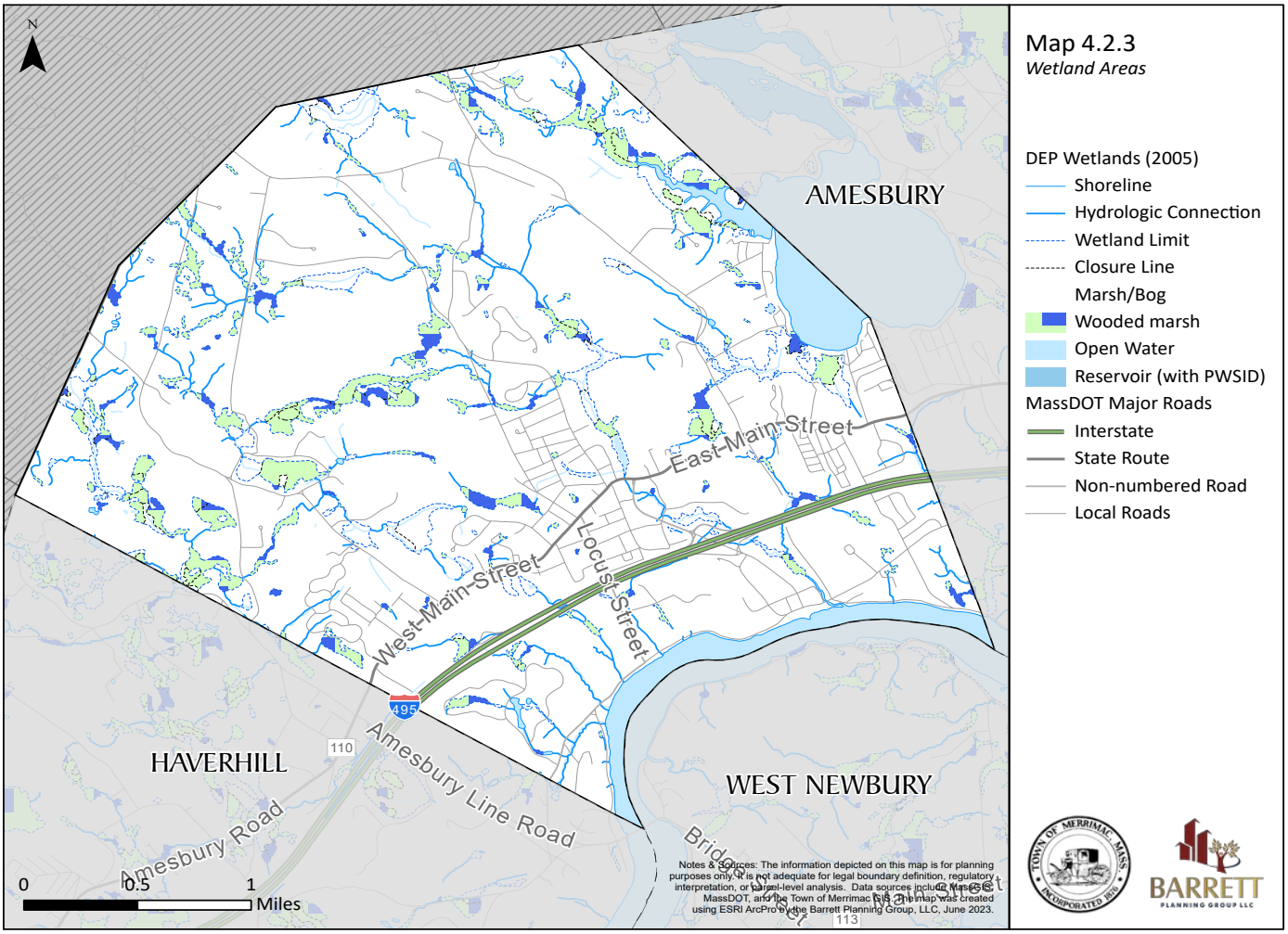
Wetlands are an important component of the hydrologic system. They play a critical role in water storage and flood control, and many species of wildlife depend on wetland habitat. Wetlands also protect water quality and function as groundwater recharge and discharge areas. Nearly 10 percent (5,070 acres) of Merrimac's total land area is wetlands. Many wetland areas abut the Town's rivers and ponds. Other significant wetlands include the area south of Lake Attitash near the Town's well field and to the west of Bear Hill Road. The large wetland between Red Oak Hill and Long Hill in the Town Forest is the source of a tributary to Cobbler's Brook and Silver Stream. Merrimac's wetlands are comprised of shrub swamp, newly formed beaver pond, shallow marsh, and deciduous wooded swamp. [23]

The Town's wetlands are protected by both the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act and the local Wetlands Bylaw. The purpose of the local wetland bylaw is to protect the Town's wetlands and related water resources by creating a 50-foot no disturbance zone and a 100-foot buffer zone around these significant resource areas. The Conservation Commission has jurisdiction to regulate development activity within these areas.[24]

Vegetation and Habitats

Merrimac is part of the southeastern hardwood (or mixed deciduous) forest. Upland

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



forests are predominantly hardwood – northern red oak, shagbark hickory, beech, red maple, and birch – with small stands of softwood hemlock and white pine. Red and silver maple, speckled alder, white oaks, pin oaks, hemlock, sweet pepperbush, and highbush blueberry are common in swampy, wet areas.

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

The Massachusetts Natural Heritage Program has documented only one threatened plant species in Merrimac: American Bittersweet (Celastruss scandens). The most recent recorded observation of this vascular plant in Merrimac was in 1951.[25] Approximately 60% of all land in Merrimac is considered part of an ecologically significant habitat. The Town owns several large, connected tracts of this habitat land, including the Town Forest and the Perkins Conservation Area.

There are three important wildlife corridors that allow species to move through and within Merrimac. The first is the riparian corridor along the Merrimack River. The second is a swath of open space comprising forest and farmland (meadows and grasslands) west of McLaren Trail in Town Forest, where species can travel north to New Hampshire. The third corridor is anchored by the McLaren Trail and expands eastward to Lake Attitash, encompassing the Cobbler's Brook riparian corridor.[26] The culverts along I-495 however, are not large enough to connect wildlife habitat in northern Merrimac to the Merrimack River.[27] Additionally, there are three certified vernal pools and 29 potential vernal pools identified in Merrimac. Vernal pools provide critical habitat for many amphibian and invertebrate species relying on breeding habitats free of fish predators.[28]

Fisheries and Wildlife

Common animal species in northeastern Massachusetts rely on Merrimac's forests, fields, vernal pools, and wetlands. Bats, beavers, chipmunks, fishers, mice, minks, muskrats, otters, porcupine, raccoons, shrews, gray squirrels, voles, weasels, and woodchucks inhabit many of Merrimac's forests. Fox and white-tailed deer are also quite common. Residents occasionally report sighting bears, bobcats, coyotes and moose.[29]

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

25 Town of Merrimac, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023, 24.
26 Ibid
27 Town of Merrimac, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023, 24-5.
28 Town of Merrimac, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023, 24.
29 Town of Merrimac, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023, 24-5.

Table 4.2.1. Endangered, Threatened, and Special Concern Species in Merrimac				
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.

Riparian corridors shelter the bald eagle and protect the water supply for aquatic birds and Merrimac's many fish. Amphibious species including frogs and salamanders, as well as snakes and turtles, use the Town's ponds and wetlands, as do cormorants, cranes, ducks, geese, herons, and ospreys. Riparian wetlands and vernal pools provide habitat for the Blanding's Turtle, the Blue Spotted Salamander, the Eastern Box Turtle, and Spotted Turtle.[30] Table 4.2.1 displays six species the Massachusetts Natural Heritage Program has documented as endangered, threatened, or of special concern in Merrimac.

Scenic and Unique Resources

Many of Merrimac's roads retain a rural character with narrow paving, winding routes, and scenic vistas (particularly in northern Merrimac). River Road however, is the only road designated as a Scenic Road by Town Meeting. The Mother's Day storm of 2006 washed out a half-mile stretch of River Road, and in recent years a change in frequency and severity of storms has further compromised the road. The damaged road is now closed to all auto, bicycle and pedestrian traffic, and the Town lacks the federal funds to make adequate repairs despite local interest.[31]

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

CULTURAL RESOURCES

From the early 19th-century homes of Merrimacport, to the Victorian-style commercial structures in Merrimac Square, to the agricultural landscapes of northern Merrimac, the town has a wealth of historic resources spanning more than 200 years reinforcing its unique cultural identity.[32]

30 Town of Merrimac, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023, 24-5.
31 Town of Merrimac, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023, 25.
32 Town of Merrimac, Master Plan, 2002.

MERRIMAC
HISTORICAL
MUSEUM
34 W. MAIN ST.

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

Historic Areas

Merrimacport and Merrimac Square are the oldest parts of Town, and as a result, most of the historic buildings in Merrimac are found in these areas. During the industrial revolution, Southern Merrimac was an important seat of the horse-carriage industry; there were at least 19 carriage shops in Merrimac Square and Merrimacport. The Town had a national reputation for producing fine coaches, broughams and victorias. At one point, the industry employed nearly 50 percent of the Town. These villages retain excellent examples of colonial and Victorian structures built during this era of prosperity.[33]

Merrimacport

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

Merrimac Square

Merrimac Square is located at the junction of Route 110, School Street and Church Street. Merrimac Center (which includes Merrimac Square) developed in response to the burgeoning horse carriage industry flourishing in the latter half of the 19th century. The grand Victorian-style homes along West Main Street, with their extensive architectural embellishment, were built for owners and managers of the numerous carriage shops, and they attest to the affluence that this industry brought into Merrimac.[34]

Local Policies and Practices

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

PAST PLANNING EFFORTS

Master Plan (2002)

Merrimac's last master plan, completed in 2002, included specific goals and objectives related to protection and preservation of natural and cultural resources in Town. These

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

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

goals focused on treating Merrimac's natural resources, historic architecture, and landmarks as irreplaceable public assets. The goals aim to assure that new development respects the topography and character of the land. The goals also include retaining and enhancing Merrimac Square as the Town's social, economic, civic, and governmental center. Additionally, they aim to support and promote cultural activities for the education, entertainment, and general benefit of Merrimac residents.

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

BOARDS, COMMITTEES, AND COMMISSIONS

Conservation Commission
The Conservation Commission, formed by 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. 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.

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

Merrimac Historical Commission (MHC)
The Merrimac Historical Commission (MHC) is a town committee that documents, records, and preserves Merrimac's history. By encouraging renovation and adaptive reuse as alternatives to demolition of historic properties, the MHC works to ensure that growth and development can coincide with the protection of the historical assets of the town.[35]

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

35 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.[36]

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."[37] 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).[38] The Town's most significant open space holdings are the Town Forest, Perkins Conservation Area, Cobbler's Brook Greenway, and Jay McLaren Trail.[39] 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.[40]

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 conservation restriction with federal/state assistance.[41] The majority of open space and recreation areas are Town-owned, with ongoing efforts by officials to secure additional parcels through Town funding and potential implementation of the Community Preservation Act (CPA). Despite an unsuccessful town vote in 2001 to implement the CPA into funding, it remains a strategic tool for smart growth, enabling communities to conserve open space, preserve historic sites, facilitate affordable housing, and develop outdoor recreational facilities. This act, funded by a percentage of residents' taxes, could significantly bolster future funding for open space maintenance and acquisi-

36 Massachusetts Historical Commission. Reconnaissance Survey Town Report: Merrimac, 5.
37 Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services. Property Type Classification Codes, 2016.
38 MassGIS. "Protected Open Space and Recreation," Updated in July 2023.
39 MassGIS. "Protected Open Space and Recreation," Updated in July 2023.
40 Merrimac Open Space Committee. Annual Report 2022.
41 MassGIS. "Protected Open Space and Recreation," Updated July 2023.

tion.[42] There have been ongoing local efforts to secure permanent protection for the Town Forest through approval under Article 97 of the Massachusetts Constitution Amendments, although no action had been taken as of 2024. This article establishes the citizens' right to a clean environment, encompassing natural, scenic, historical, and aesthetic qualities. If the parcel is taken for conservation purposes, it is permanently protected for that purpose unless the General Court votes by a 2/3 margin of each house to remove such protection.[43]

The OSC and Conservation Commission are groups dedicated to preserving and maintaining specific areas of open space. These include key access points to existing open spaces and trails such as Smith Farm on Highland Road, Hoyt Farm on Birch Meadow Road, Tamarack Farm on Locust Street, Town Improvement Society Land, Sargent Farmland, the Waterhouse Property on Bear Hill Road, and Sunday Farm on Birchmeadow Street.[44]

Indian Head Park, once a town parcel with public use, has closed to the public and will remain closed indefinitely. The challenge stems from the absence of public access beyond the town's control, leading to the closure of a previously available public beach on the property. The surrounding private ownership has made it impossible to reach the beach, contributing to the termination of its public use.

There are no Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) in Merrimac, but the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) has identified the Merrimack River riparian corridor as a Bio Map Core Habitat area. This means that the area is critical for endangered and threatened species needing protection, and it corresponds with the largely unbroken open space corridors in Merrimac. NHESP describes this area as significant because it buffers and connects Bio Map Core Habitats, and is comprised of large, naturally vegetated areas relatively free from the impact of roads and other development.[45]

Merrimac shares many natural resources with its neighbors, such as the 180-mile-long Merrimack River, its watershed, and Lake Attitash. These water bodies have supported Water resources that have been crucial in sustaining both residential livelihoods and economic activities essential for the town's development since its separation from Amesbury in 1876.[46] These water bodies also contribute to the town's scenic beauty and recreational appeal, providing opportunities for outdoor activities such as fishing, boating, and other water-based recreation, enhancing the overall quality of life for residents.

Chapter 61 Land and Agricultural Preservation

The Chapter 61 Forest Tax Program offers special tax benefits to landowners who keep their land as open space for timber production, agriculture, or recreation. Landowners have the option to withdraw their land from the program at any time. In such cases, the town has the right of first refusal, meaning it gets the opportunity to purchase the land at a mutually agreeable price between the current owner and

42 Community Preservation Coalition. About. https://www.communitypreservation.org/about
43 MassGov. Article 97: The-Public-Lands-Preservation-Act. https://www.mass.gov/info-details/article-97-the-public-lands-preservation-act
44 Merrimac Open Space Committee. Annual Report 2022.
45 Town of Merrimac, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023, 27
46 Massachusetts Historical Commission. Reconnaissance Survey Town Report: Merrimac, 11.

MerriHill Tree Farm, a local agricultural business located on West Main Street/Route 110.

the Town.[47] Currently there are 321.13 acres temporarily protected in the Chapter 61 program for agriculture use. The largest holding (82 acres) is located on Birchmeadow Road.

The agricultural acreage in Merrimac has experienced a decline in recent years influenced by regional market forces.[48] To support farmers in retaining their land, the Town employs the Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program (APR). Through this program, farmland owners are offered compensation equal to the difference between the fair market value and the agricultural value of their farmland in exchange for a permanent deed restriction protecting the farmland for future agricultural use.[49]

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 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.

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

48 Town of Merrimac, 2002 Master Plan, 2002, 2.1.

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

A view of the Jay McLaren Trail Footbridge

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.[50] 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.[51]

WALKABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Sidewalks and trails are maintained across Merrimac, as shown in Map 4.3.1. 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.[52]

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50 Town of Merrimac, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023, 19.
51 Town of Merrimac, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023, 24
52 Merrimac Open Space Committee. Open Space and Recreation Plan Progress Report, June 2023

Table 4.3.1 Merrimac Recreational Trails		
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.

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, sidewalks, fields, and playgrounds across Merrimac. Over time, the Town will need to reassess its compliance with program accessibility, and it may become necessary to acquire new accessible equipment or make structural modifications.[53]

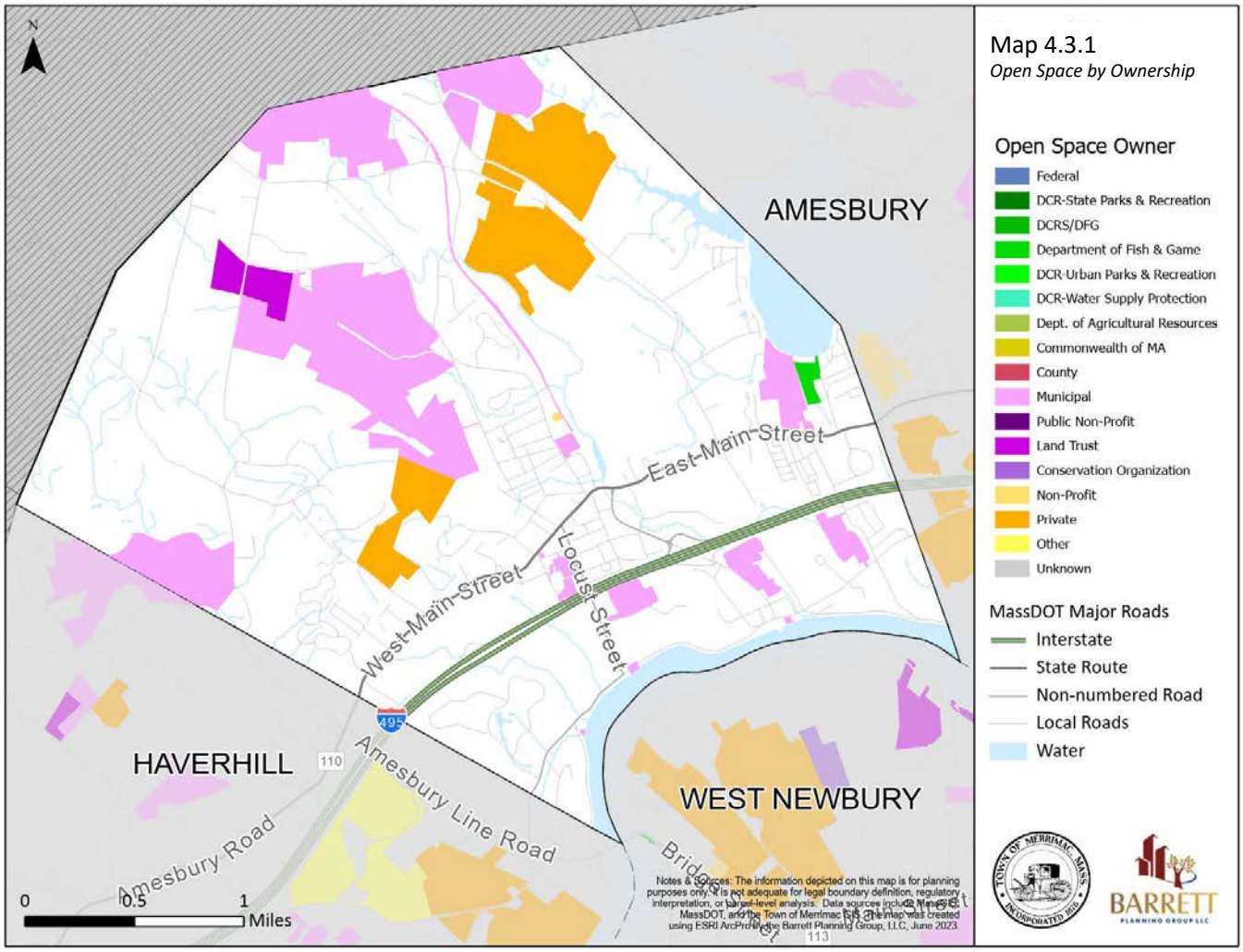
Trails

Merrimac has about 130 miles of trails, which are managed and maintained by the Open Space Committee. The resilience of this trail system hinges on the continuous recruitment and retention of volunteers, coupled with essential elements such as, equipment provision and effective coordination. Some trails and sensitive habitat areas have been damaged by motorized vehicle use or other disturbing activities.[54]

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

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

54 Town of Merrimac, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023, 28



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 Emery 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.[55]

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.[56] Table 4.3.2 displays Merrimac's current recreational facilities open to the public, with Carriage Town Park being the largest recreational parcel in town.

Local Policies and Practices

Merrimac has several guidelines, volunteers, and working groups committed to environmental management concerning the utilization of open space and recreation.

55 Town of Merrimac, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023, 27.
56 Merrimac Open Space Committee. Emery Street Property Survey, March 2023.

Table 4.3.2 Merrimac Parks with Recreation Facilities		
Name	**Property Facilities**	**Estimated Acres**
Town Forest	4 soccer fields	15.0
Emery 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.		

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.

BOARDS, COMMITTEES, AND COMMISSIONS

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.

Open Space Committee

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

Furthermore, the OSC expands land conservation efforts, exemplified by the protection of the Town Forest through a combination of grant funding, OSC and DPW budget allocations, and Town Meeting appropriations. In addition to preserving natural spaces, the OSC educates Merrimac residents about open space and tax incentives associated with land donation for conservation restrictions through Essex County Greenbelt.[57] Despite these initiatives, the OSC faces a challenge in advancing a project to add a kayak and canoe launch for town river access. Unfortunately, the project is currently on hold due to insufficient parking space. Nevertheless, the OSC continues to play a pivotal role in the comprehensive management of land acquisition for open space

57 Town of Merrimac. Open Space Committee. https://townofmerrimac.com/open-space-committee/

NO PARKING ANY TIME TOW AWAY ZONE
LAKE ATTITASH
SWIMMING PROHIBITED
AT THE LAUNCH AREA
Please don't kill us with bread!
Bread is actually a danger to us ducks and other water birds.
It causes Angel Wing which can make our feathers grow too quickly. This strains our muscles and can stop us flying.
Our friends the swans develop fatal gut and heart disease.
Bread is bad for our water environment. It rots, and pollutes the water.
This allows bacteria to grow and encourages rats. It causes algal bloom which gets into our lungs and kill us birds.
PLEASE BE A GOOD NEIGHBOR
CLEAN UP AFTER YOUR DOG

and recreation. Serving as a central information hub within the town, they facilitate and oversee endeavors aimed at enhancing open space and recreational opportunities for the community.

Lake Attitash Association
Established in 1993, the Lake Attitash Association (LAA) was created to foster recreational activities, promote enhancements, and advocate for responsible behavior within the Lake Attitash area and its watershed. This mission is dedicated to serving the best interests of both residents and visitors alike. They also wish to preserve the lake's aesthetic, environmental, and recreational values.[58] The Association deals with the overgrowth of nuisance weeds, water quality, boating safety, recreational opportunities, and wildlife preservation through local fundraising efforts, regional advocacy, and community meetings in Merrimac and Merrimack Valley.

Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
The Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC) serves as a collaborative organization working with cities and towns in the Merrimack Valley region to address issues related to land use, economic development, transportation, and environmental planning. The commission works with Merrimac and 14 surrounding communities. MVPC held several Community Resilience Workshops in Merrimac throughout 2020, helping residents identify infrastructure, social, and environmental vulnerabilities. This has helped raise awareness on the current consequences of climate change and how to use town resources to become more resilient to future climate change impacts. [59]

Merrimac has also implemented a pedestrian upgrade to its village center and open multi-use trails in collaboration with MVPC in 2015 with an Active Transportation Plan. This plan outlines the current state of Merrimac and MVPC recommended improvements to streets, sidewalks, and recreational trails. The plan noted that the well-maintained sidewalks and walking paths are located in the village center, where the community is densely settled. The McLaren Trail lies along a former rail line, but it needs a better-defined entrance on Church Street.[60] MVPC also found that these entrances were difficult to find, and more signage would be beneficial. Children walk and ride bikes to school and the playgrounds, usually using sidewalks, though the inclusion of bike lanes around these areas could improve safety. Broad Street, a popular bicycling route connecting to the river, could potentially serve more cyclists if it were updated for safe access.[61] The MVPC continues to engage with Merrimac on plans and reports geared toward municipal improvements.

Merrimack River Watershed Council
The Merrimack River Watershed Council (MRWC) is a non-profit organization aiming to improve and conserve the watershed for people and wildlife through advocacy, education, recreation, and science.[62] MRWC was founded in 1976 when the Merrimack River was one of the ten most polluted rivers in the country. They have since been working toward maintaining clean water and improving recreational opportunities for the re-

58 Lake Attitash Association. About the Lake Attitash Association. https://lakeattitash.org/
59 Merrimack Valley Planning Commission. An Integrated Climate Change Strategy for the Commonwealth. https://mvpc.org/merrimac-mvp-storymap/
60 Merrimack Valley Planning Commission. Active Transportation Plan Final 2015. https://mvpc.org/wp-content/uploads/FINAL-MVMPO-2021-2025-TIP.pdf.
61 Merrimack Valley Planning Commission. Active Transportation Plan Final 2015. https://mvpc.org/wp-content/uploads/FINAL-MVMPO-2021-2025-TIP.pdf.
62 Merrimack River Watershed Council. About. October 2, 2023. https://merrimack.org/about/

gion.[63] They offer opportunities for boating to communities spanning from the Lawrence Dam to the New Hampshire border. Additionally, they deliver online educational programs and play a role in shaping environmental policies related to the Merrimack River.

Essex County Greenbelt Association
The Essex County Greenbelt Association works with municipalities around Essex County to conserve farmland, wildlife habitat, and scenic landscapes throughout the region.[64] They own several parcels of land in Merrimac and contribute funding towards conservation land and trail maintenance. They also help to develop the Open Space and Recreation Plan for Merrimac every several years. A recent major land acquisition by the Association is Beaver Pond Reservation. It was conserved in two stages: 23 acres were protected on the east side of Battis Road in 2019, and an additional 16 acres were conserved across the road in 2020. Town Meeting voted to create a conservation restriction on the property held by the Association, allowing them to apply for grants such as the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Conservation Partnership Program on the Town's behalf.[65] Ensuring the preservation of this property plays a crucial role in safeguarding the drinking water for Merrimac residents, as the entire water supply for this area is derived from wells.

Community Needs and Goals

As per the 2016-2023 Open Space and Recreation Report crafted by the OSC, the community expresses a collective aspiration to enrich different aspects of natural resources, open space, and recreation.[66] The OSC and other Town officials aim to enhance the overall quality of life by implementing and retaining the following practices:

- Protect the town's drinking water supply
- Manage species' habitats
- Improve access to and manage existing open space, especially at the town's water access points
- Manage the impacts of new growth on the Town's natural resources
- Manage the town's existing recreation facilities
- Provide diverse recreational opportunities for all residents
- Create small parks and neighborhood open space
- Acquire more land for field sports
- Create and link trail and bike paths
- Maintain sidewalks
- Manage the open space inventory[67]

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

63 Merrimack River Watershed Council. About. October 2, 2023. https://merrimack.org/about/
64 Essex County Greenbelt Association. About. https://ecga.org/
65 Essex County Greenbelt Association. Property: Beaver Pond Reservation. https://ecga.org/
66 Town of Merrimac, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023, 5.
67 Town of Merrimac, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016-2023, 43.

Lost Cat
Greenbelt
Beaver Pond
Conservation Area
Merrimac
Trail Guide
Stunning property abuts the 333-acre Merrimac Town Forest, where Cobbler's Brook winds through mature woodlands and boggy wetlands on its way to the Merrimack River.

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.[68]

Table 4.4.1 Housing Unit Types Compared to Essex County

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.

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. [69]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 building is under one single 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

68 U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2021. Table B25002.
69 MH Village, "North Shore Community Mobile Home Park."

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.[70]

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

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

Table 4.4.2 Housing Unit Types Compared to Nearby Communities

	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.

Housing Age and Production

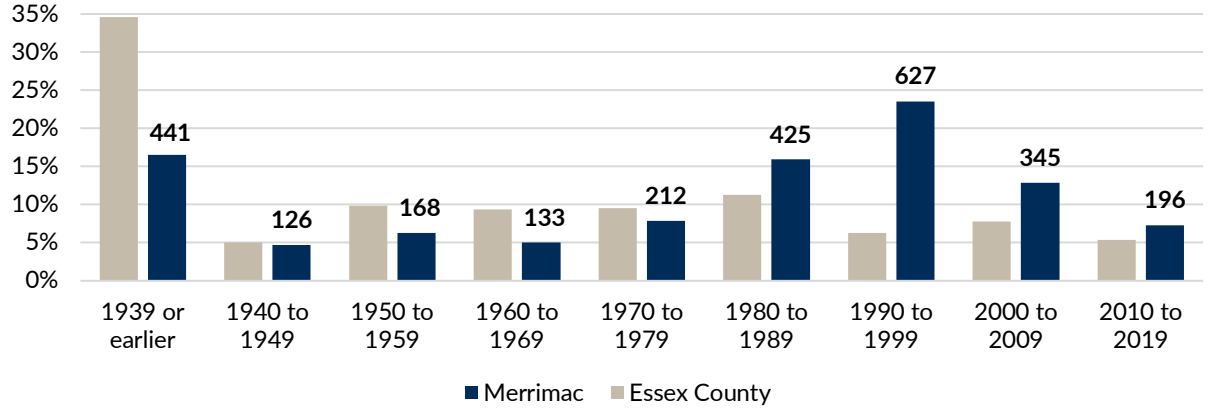
In comparison to the county's housing stock, Merrimac contains considerably newer homes. According to estimates from the 2021 American Community Survey, the median construction year of housing units in Merrimac is 1986 compared to 1959 for Essex County.[71] Furthermore, nearly 35 percent of current housing structures in the county were built before 1940, as shown in Figure 4.4.1. In contrast, Merrimac witnessed the construction of a significant portion (23.5 percent) of its current housing structures in the 1990s, with over half built since 1980. The number of units built has gradually declined since the town's peak production period in the 1990s. Participants in community meetings point to increasing construction costs as contributing to the relative lack of production in recent years. The result is a limited buying and selling market, further discouraging developers from initiating housing projects.

According to local building permit records, the Town approved 60 new residential units for construction between 2018 to 2022. These include 21 single-family homes, 18 townhomes (attached single-family units), 10 duplexes (20 units), and 1 mobile home.[72]

70 Town of Merrimac Inspectional Services, "Condominium Conversion."
71 U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2021. Table B25035.
72 Town of Merrimac, "Permit Listing Report 2018-2022."

Figure 4.4.1 Number of Units Built by Period

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



HOUSEHOLD DEMOGRAPHICS

Household Types

According to census estimates, there are 2,589 total households in Merrimac. The town's household profile is largely family oriented as Table 4.4.3 shows that 67.9 percent of households in town are families. Household unit sizes are also increasing, with 25.7 percent having four bedrooms or more, up from 18.7 percent in 2016 and 14.0 percent in 2011 as shown in Figure 4.4.2. Simultaneously, the share of one-, two-, and three-bedroom units have fallen since 2011. These changes indicate that developers often have family homebuyers in mind as home sizes in Merrimac's housing market have increased to support larger families. The average household size in Merrimac is 2.58 people compared to the county at 2.56 and the state at 2.48 residents.[73] Over a quarter of householders live alone, but census estimates show only 4.2 percent of units have one bedroom.

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.

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

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

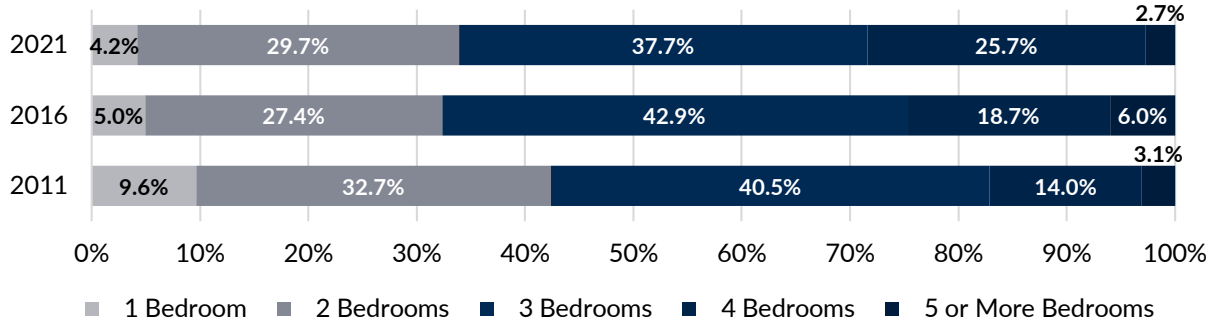
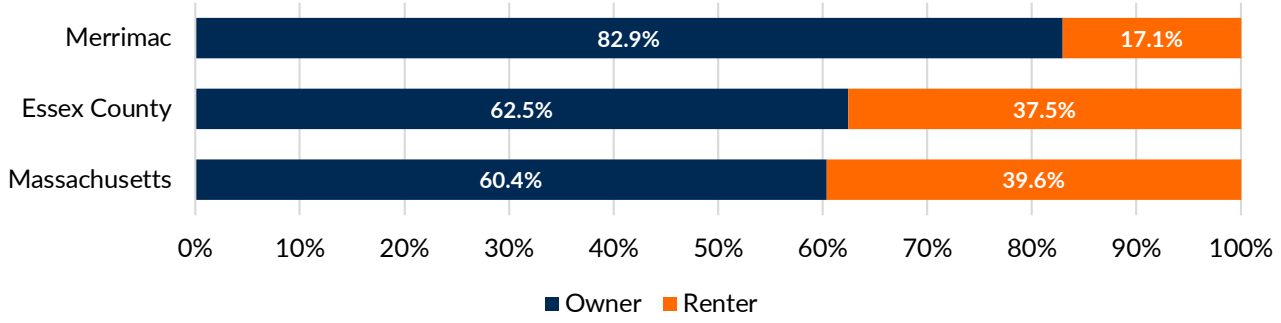


Figure 4.4.3 Household Tenure

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



Furthermore, Figure 4.4.3 shows most households in Merrimac are owner-occupied. Of 2,620 households, 82.9 percent (2,173 units) are owner-occupied, and 17.1 percent (447) are rented. This proportion of owner-occupied units in Merrimac is significantly higher than the county (62.5 percent) and the state (60.4 percent). This aligns with the town's demographic profile, which mainly consists of family households and residents seeking homeownership to establish roots and raise a family in Merrimac, as expressed by residents in community meetings.[74] In contrast, Essex County and Massachusetts have significantly larger shares of renter-occupied housing. This is likely explained by the influence of housing characteristics of major cities on county- and state-wide statistics.

Household Vacancy and Mobility

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.[75] 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.[76]

74 See Community Meeting Summary in Appendix.

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

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

Figure 4.4.4 Geographic Origins of Residents

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

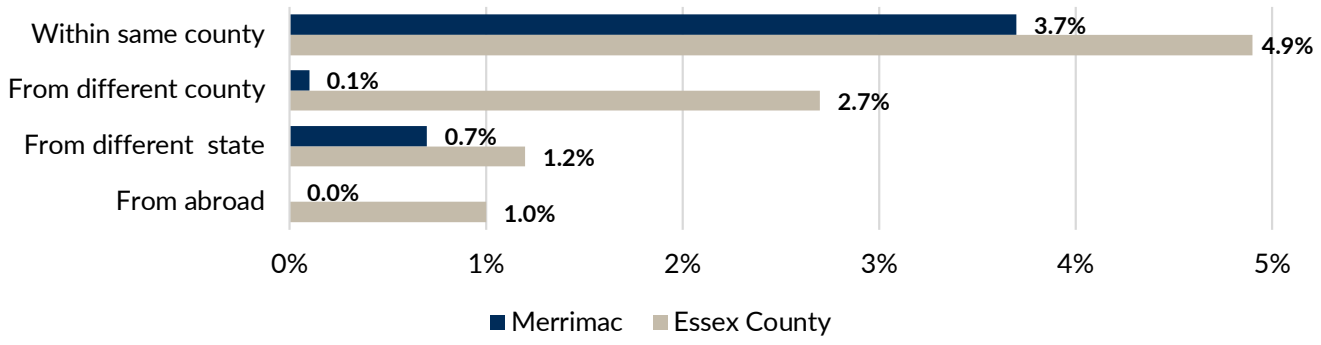


Figure 4.4.5 Year Householder Moved In

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2021 Table B25038

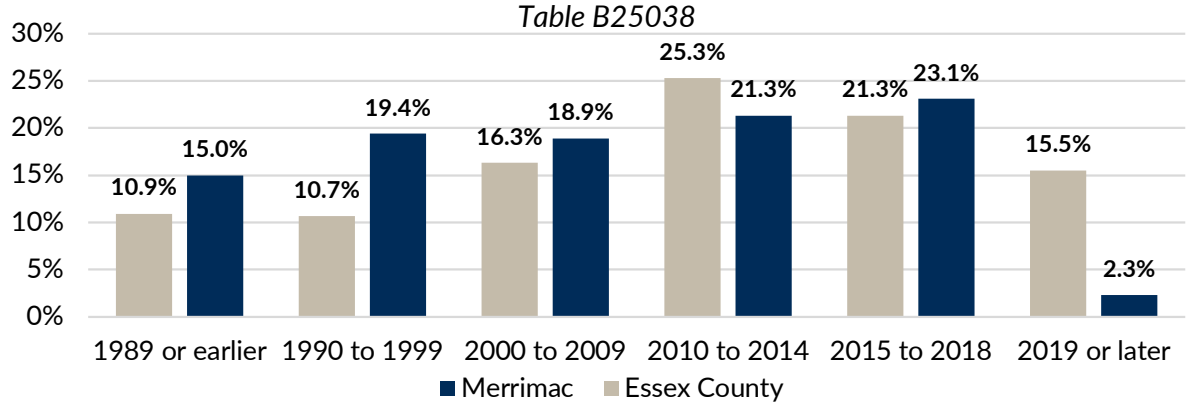


Figure 4.4.5 shows when residents moved into their current household unit. It depicts a very low percentage of residents moving in recent years (2019 or later) at 2.3 percent. This suggests very few residents moved into Merrimac, or within the town, and there was a drastic fall in household mobility.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

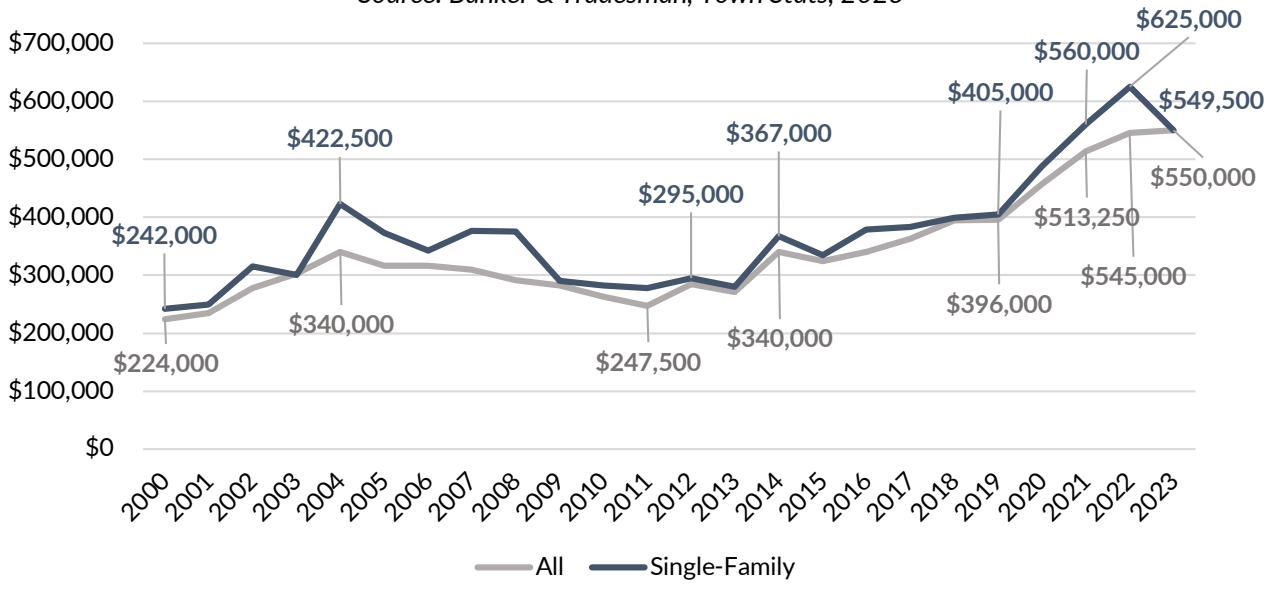
HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Home Values

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

Figure 4.4.6 Median Sales Price of Homes in Merrimac

Source: Banker & Tradesman, Town Stats, 2023

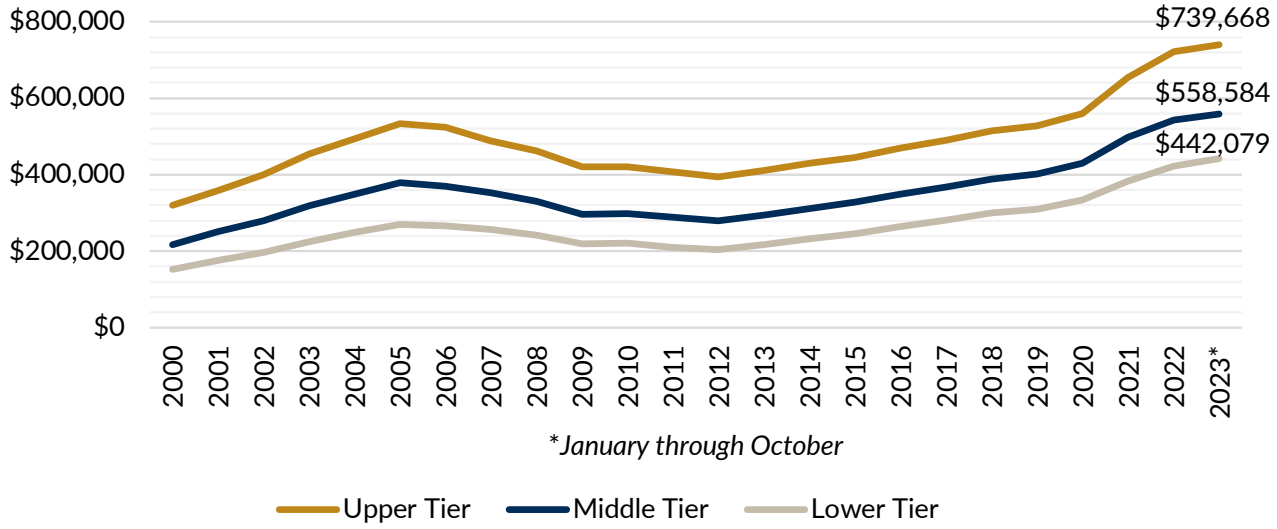


Zillow provides home value data in their Zillow Home Value Index, generating data for several different categories of housing and locations in the country. Figure 4.4.7 displays the home values in Merrimac in three tiers: lower (5th to 35th percentile), middle (35th to 65th percentile), and higher (65th 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.

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 more typical single-family detached homes. According to 2021 census estimates, the median value of a mobile home was $101,400, less than one-fifth the median value of a single-family home at $549,500.[77]

Figure 4.4.7 Typical Home Value by Tier

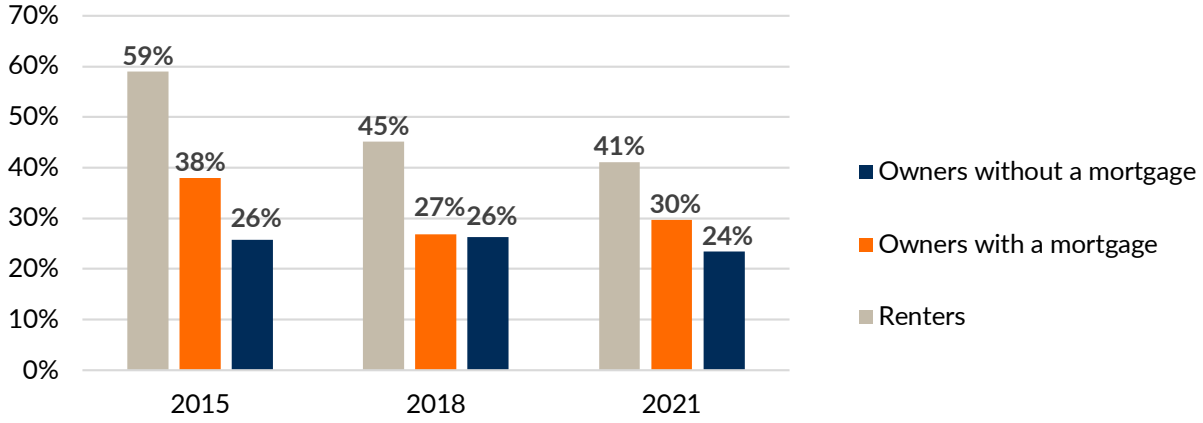
Source: Zillow Home Value Index



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

Figure 4.4.8 Housing Cost Burden

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates; 2021, 2018, and 2016. Tables B25101 and B25106

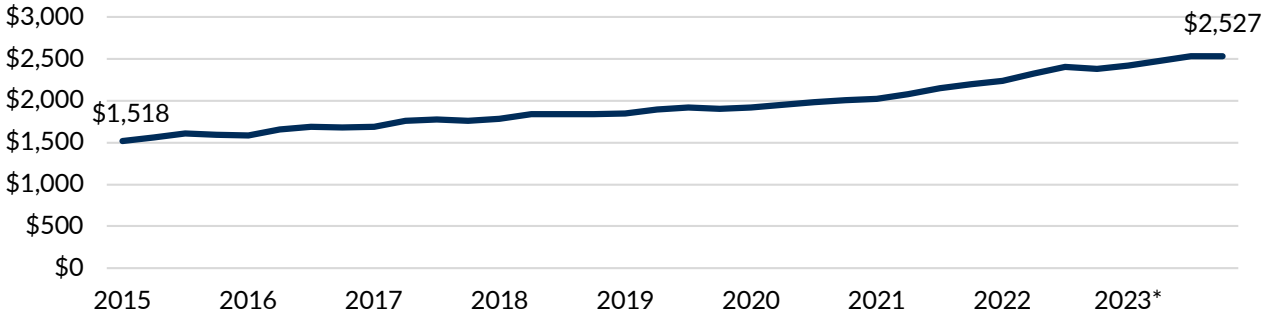


Cost Burdens

Figure 4.4.8 displays the percentage of homeowners and renters who experience high housing cost burdens. Cost burdens are considered high if the costs of housing; including but not limited to mortgage, rent, taxes, utilities, and maintenance; exceed 30 percent of the household income. In Merrimac, 24 percent of owners without a mortgage, 30 percent of owners with a mortgage, and 41 percent of renters experience cost burdens. Since 2015, these percentages have decreased, which may contradict the increase in home values and sale prices. However, other factors to consider are household incomes being adjusted to inflation and the increase in wealthier homebuyers and renters outpacing the rate of growth in home values. Figure 4.4.9. shows that the average monthly rent in Essex County has increased two-thirds since 2015, from $1,518 to $2,527 by the fourth quarter of 2023. While Zillow does not provide rent data specifically for Merrimac, the county-wide trend does provide a degree of insight into rent trends for the town.

Figure 4.4.9 Average Rents in Essex County

Source: Zillow Observed Rent Index



**January through October*

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).

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

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

Local Policies and Practices

LOCAL GROUPS AND PLANNING EFFORTS

Merrimac Housing Authority

The Merrimac Housing Authority was established as required by the Massachusetts General Law (MGL) Chapter 121B and is managed by the Amesbury Housing Authority. Their mission is to secure and provide housing for low-income families, elderly residents, and people with disabilities. They utilize several State funding programs to administer housing assistance to those with limited financial means. As such, they follow an income-based approach, for which eligibility is determined by the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC).[78]

78 Merrimac Housing Authority.

Affordable Housing Board of Trustees
This board was established to create and preserve affordable housing for the benefit of low- and moderate-income households in Merrimac. The goal of the Board is to increase the availability of housing in Merrimac that meets the state standard for affordability while retaining the nature of our community.[79]

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

79 Town of Merrimac, Affordable Housing Board of Trustees.

A house located in Merrimacport

1882
Technics
MARKET
INFLUX SALON
MERRIMAC
HOUSE OF PIZZA
24

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

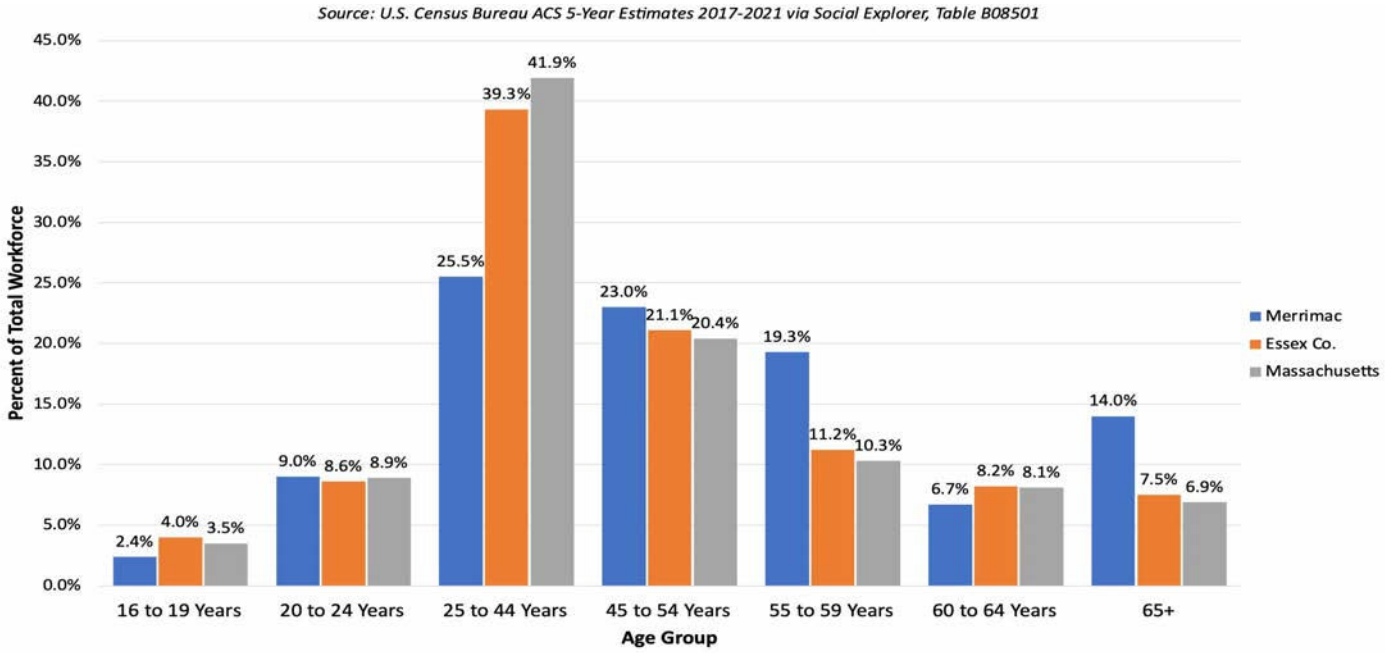
POPULATION AND LABOR FORCE

In 2021, the total labor force in Merrimac was 3,683.[80] 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.[81] 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.

Figure 4.5.1 Labor Force Population by Age 2021

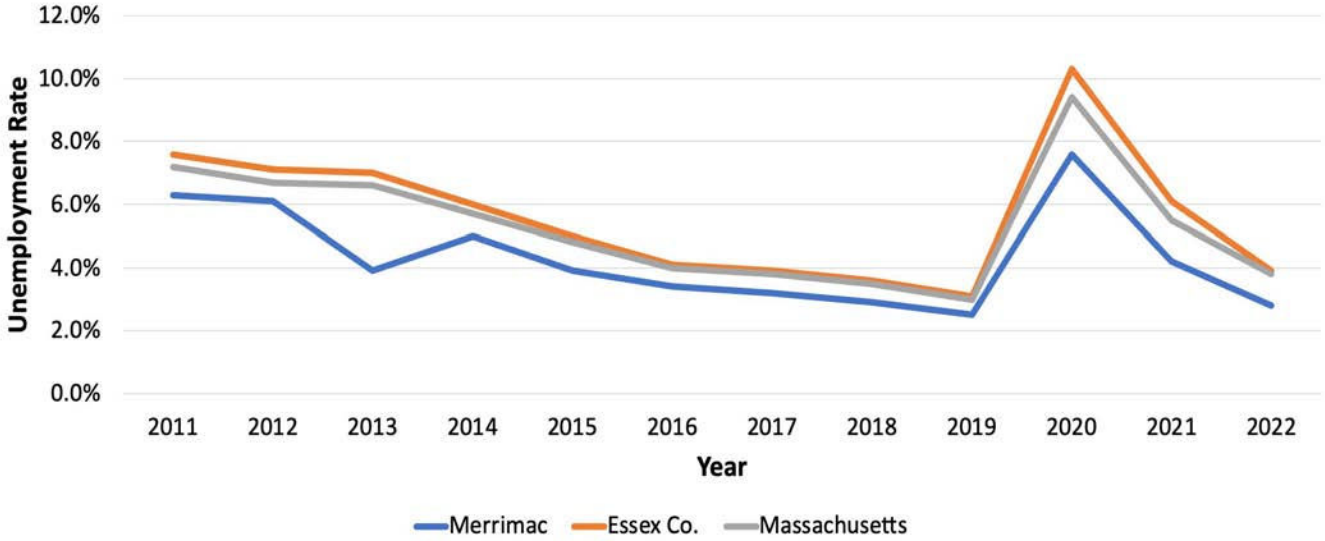
Source: U.S. Census Bureau ACS 5-Year Estimates 2017-2021 via Social Explorer, Table B08501



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

Figure 4.5.2 Annual Unemployment by Year 2011-2022

Source: Massachusetts Department of Economic Research, Labor Force and Unemployment Data



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.

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 workers.[82] Compared to county and state-wide trends, more Merrimac workers are employed in the private sector, and fewer are self-employed, employed in the public sector or in private non-profits. This appears to be a local trend, as these rates are in line with Merrimac's surrounding municipalities both in Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

Education

In Merrimac, 96 percent of workers have at least a high school diploma or GED equivalent. This exceeds the rates in Essex County (90 percent) and Massachusetts (91 percent). However, significantly fewer than average Merrimac residents possess a bachelor's degree or higher. In Merrimac, 34 percent of residents over the age of 25 have completed at least a bachelor's degree, compared to the state average of 45 percent, and the Essex County average of 41 percent.[83] While the percent of Merrimac's residents possessing a Bachelor's Degree is in line with state and county shares, Merrimac residents' rates of master's, professional and doctorate degrees are well below state and regional figures, as shown in Table 4.5.1.

Workforce Development

Merrimac residents' local higher education and vocational training needs are served by several key regional institutions. The nearest center for higher education

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

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

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							

is Northern Essex County Community College in neighboring Haverhill. Whittier Regional Technical Vocational High School, also in Haverhill offers vocational programming for high schoolers and night programming for adults.[84]

Workforce development services are offered by the Merrimack Valley Workforce Board (MVWB), the regional MassHire Workforce Board for the Merrimack Valley. MVWB provides career services and training to local residents and workforce support for local businesses. MVWB maintains offices in both Lawrence and Haverhill.[85] The University of Massachusetts Lowell has also recently opened a satellite campus in Haverhill. This campus does not offer courses but does provide workforce development and corporate education for startups and entrepreneurs, a business incubator, a fabricating lab and co-working space for small businesses. [86]

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

- Merrimack College (North Andover, MA)
- University of Massachusetts Lowell (Lowell, MA)
- North Point Bible College and Seminary (Haverhill, MA)
- Cambridge College Lawrence (Lawrence, MA)
- Northern Essex Community College, Haverhill Campus (Haverhill, MA)
- Northern Essex Community College, Lawrence Campus (Lawrence, MA)

Occupations of Merrimac Residents

Most of Merrimac's labor force is employed within five industry groups, which together account for 60 percent of all Merrimac's employed labor force. The largest industry group by total employment is "Educational Services, and Healthcare and Social

84 Whittier Regional High School https://whittiertech.org/whittier-tech

85 Merrimack Valley Workforce Board, About. Accessed January 2024. https://www.masshirem-vwb.org/about/

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

Assistance", employing 19.9 percent of Merrimac's employed labor force. Retail Trade (14.7 percent), Manufacturing (13.6 percent), and Professional, Scientific, and Management, and Administrative and Waste Management Services (12.4 percent) comprise the next largest industries.[87]

It is also helpful to analyze the Town's Industry Quotients (IQs) to help understand the competitive strengths of Merrimac's labor force. An IQ compares the percent of Merrimac residents employed in an industry with the percent of the workforce employed in that industry in Essex County, as well as statewide. IQs are important because they illustrate a community's competitive employment strengths and help identify any gaps or disconnects between the skills of local residents and the employment opportunities available in the community. Industries are considered to have a high IQ if the IQ is over 1.10. This indicates that the industry is a specialty of Merrimac residents, as more of the local labor force is involved in this industry than average. Merrimac's high IQ industries are: construction; manufacturing; wholesale trade; retail trade; transportation and warehousing, and utilities; and other services excluding public administration, as shown in Table 4.5.2. While industry groups with a high IQ have a higher-than-average presence in Merrimac, they do not necessarily employ the largest total share of residents. For example, "Transportation and Warehousing, and Utilities" has the highest IQ in Merrimac. "Transportation and

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

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

Warehousing, and Utilities" has an IQ of 1.80, meaning that this industry is 80 percent larger than the state average. However, this industry employs only 7.4 percent of the employed labor force.

The majority of Merrimac's residents work outside of Merrimac. As shown in Table 4.5.3, in 2021 six percent of Merrimac's labor force worked within the town. This made Merrimac the third most common place of work for Merrimac residents. The primary commuting destination is Boston, followed by other Merrimack Valley cities including Newburyport, Haverhill, Amesbury, and Andover. No New Hampshire destinations were part of the ten largest commuting destinations.[88]

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

Earnings And Wages

The median earnings for a full time, year-round employed resident of Merrimac was $61,910 in 2021. This is seven percent and ten percent below the median earnings for Essex County and Massachusetts residents, respectively.[89]

Across almost all industries, Merrimac's employers pay lower average weekly wages than the average in Essex County. Only in the "Other Services, Excluding Public Service" category are wages higher than the state or county average.[90] As can be seen in Table 4.5.4, most Merrimac wages are less than 85 percent of wages paid in the same industries on average in the county and state. In "Health Care and Social Assistance", the largest employer, the mean weekly wage is only 48 percent of the average wage in Massachusetts, and 56 percent of the average in Essex County.

Merrimac's wages rose by 27 percent from 2017 across all industries. However, this growth was on par with the wage growth seen across the state over the last five years.[91] As a result, while Merrimac's wages have grown since 2017, the gap between the wages in Merrimac and the state and county averages remains unchanged.

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

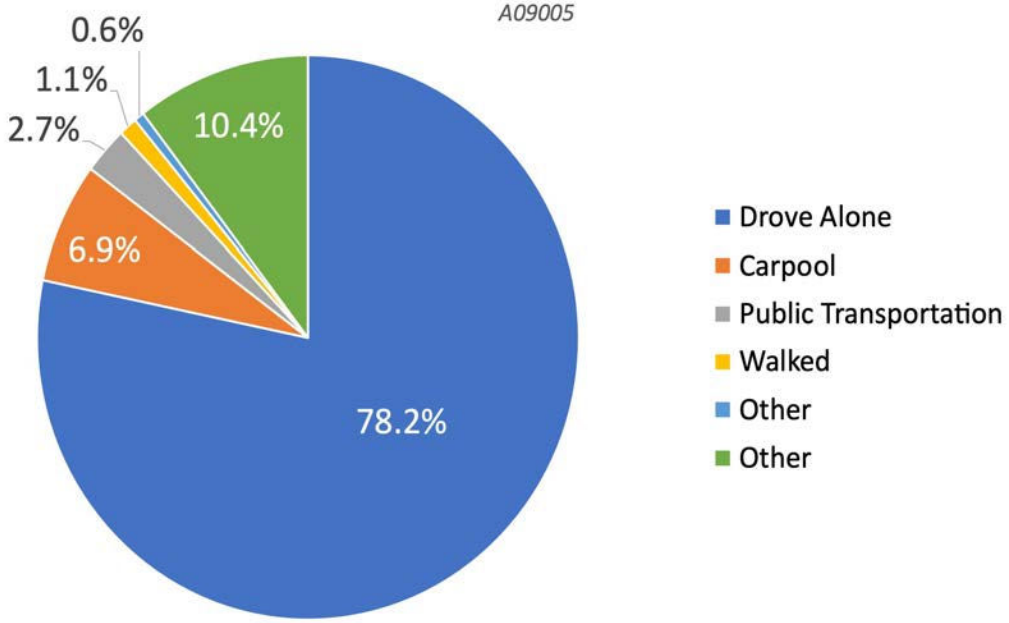
88 U.S. Census Bureau (2024) LEHR OnTheMap Work Destination Analysis 2021.
89 U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates 2017-2021 via Social Explorer Table A14006.
90 State of Massachusetts Department of Economic Research ES-202 Data on Industry Wages 2022.
91 State of Massachusetts Department of Economic Research ES-202 Data on Industry Wages 2022.

Table 4.5.4: Average Weekly Wages by Industry in Merrimac in 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 and Hunting	N/A	N/A	$1,092	31%	$1,198	3%
21	Mining, Quarrying, and Oil/Gas Extraction	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 Warehousing	$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 andLeasing	N/A	N/A	$1,592	31%	$2,031	38%
54	Professional, and Technical Services	$2,175	36%	$2,854	44%	$3,200	30%
55	Management of Companies and Enterprises	N/A	N/A	$2,937	11%	$2,927	16%
56	Administrative and Waste Services	$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 Assistance	$631	24%	$1,133	23%	$1,310	22%
71	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	N/A	N/A	$645	28%	$999	35%
72	Accommodation and Food Services	$463	37%	$579	37%	$634	35%
81	Other Services, Except Public Administration	$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

Figure 4.5.3 Means of Transportation to Work for Merrimac Residents in 2021

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates 2017-2021 via Social Explorer Table A09005



alone, higher than the state average, but on par with nearby communities.[92] An additional ten percent of the labor force work from home, slightly below the state share. Workers who commuted other ways comprise less than five percent of the total labor force. Compared to the state as a whole, more of Merrimac's labor force drives alone, and fewer residents work from home, use public transit, bike or walk to work. Figure 4.5.3 shows how many residents of Merrimac use each form of transportation.

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.

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*

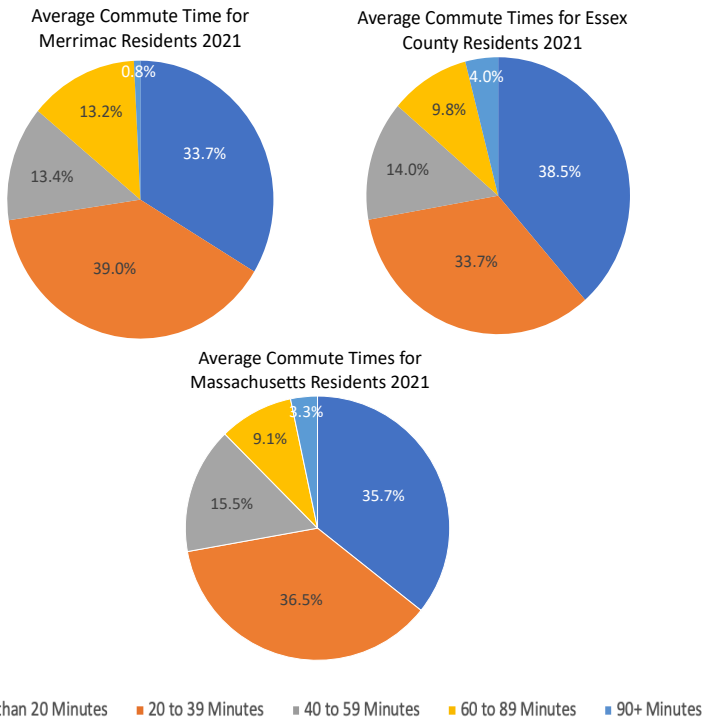


TABLE 4.5.5: Place of Origin for Workers Employed in Merrimac 2021	
Origin	**Percent of all Workers**
Merrimac	24%
Haverhill	11%
Amesbury	8%
Newburyport	4%
Groveland	3%
Newton, NH	3%
Methuen	2%
Lowell	2%
Salisbury	2%
Georgetown	2%
All Other	4%
Source: U.S. Census Bureau ACS 5-Year Estimates 2017-2021 OntheMap Work Destination Analysis	

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,

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

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.

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 town.

It is helpful to look not just at the number of jobs in each industry, but also to how industry employment compares to the industries across the state. Table 4.5.6 shows the location quotients for Merrimac's employment base. Location quotients (LQs) are a useful tool to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses in employment opportunities for a community. Comparing the prevalence of industries in Merrimac relative to these industries in Essex County and Massachusetts shows which industries the

Table 4.5.6: Workers Employed in Merrimac by Industry 2021

Industry	Total Jobs	% of Jobs	Total Jobs	% of Jobs	Total Jobs	% 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

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

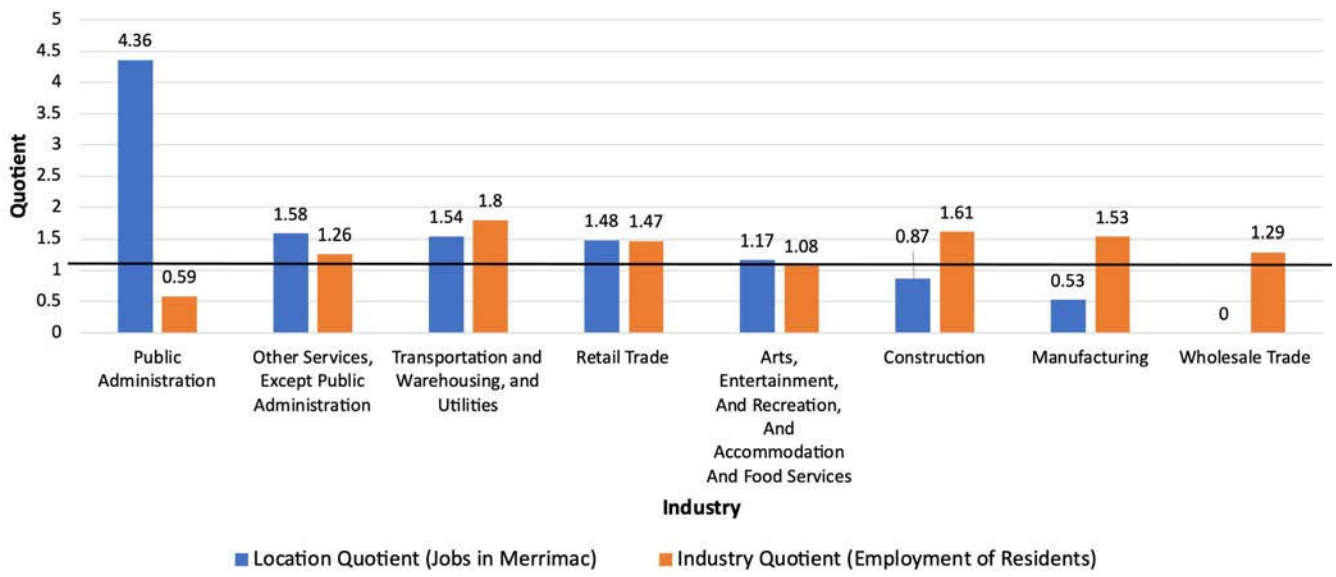
Town's employers specialize in. LQs are concerned with the employment base of a town, as opposed to the IQ which looks at the labor force of a town.

Merrimac industry groups with the highest LQs are "Public Administration"; "Other Services (Except Public Administration)"; "Transportation and Warehousing, and Utilities"; and "Retail Trade". Public Administration has the highest LQ, at 4.36, meaning that "Public Sector" jobs make up over four times more of the total jobs available in Merrimac than this industry does in Massachusetts. "Transportation and Warehousing, and Utilities," and "Other Services (Except Public Administration)" also have LQs of over 1.50, meaning they these industries are significantly more important to Merrimac's local employment base than the state at large.

The calculation of LQs also allows for a comparison between the skills and industry experience of Merrimac's residents, and the jobs available within the Town. Comparing these two quotients can help understand how well Merrimac is providing local employment opportunities for its residents, and local qualified employees for its businesses. Figure 4.5.5 shows the industries with high (>1.10) LQs and IQs. As this figure shows, there is a significant disconnect between the skills and industries Merrimac residents are employed in, and the employment opportunities available in Merrimac. While the "Retail," "Transportation and Warehousing, and Utilities," and "Other Services (except Public Administration)" are specialties of both Merrimac employers and residents, major industries of employment for Merrimac residents, like "Construction," "Manufacturing," and "Wholesale Trade" have very few jobs in Merrimac. Meanwhile, major industries within Merrimac, like "Public Administration," and "Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation, and Accommodation and Food Services" do not have local labor to match their local scale.

Figure 4.5.5 Location and Industry Quotients for Selected Industries for Merrimac Employers and Residents 2021

Source: *U.S. Census Bureau ACS 5-Year Estimates 2017-2021 via Social Explorer, Tables 17004 and B08526*



Enterprises and employers

The total number of jobs in Merrimac has remained stable since 2017.[93] However, the total number of businesses in town grew by 24 establishments, as shown in Table 4.5.7. This suggests an increase in small businesses employing fewer workers. The average Merrimac enterprise employed 4.3 employees in 2022, about half the number of employees of the average county or state establishment.[94] From 2017 to 2022, there was a noticeable increase is Administrative and Waste Services employers and jobs, rising from just 7 employers employing a monthly average of 29 workers, to 16 employers employing 85 workers. This growth appears to be driven largely by a rise in the subgroup of companies offering services to buildings and dwellings, which comprise 10 of the 16 employers, while no enterprises were reported under that category in 2017.

Merrimac's employers tend to be smaller in scale. In 2022 no enterprise employed more than 100 employees, and only three employed 50 or more.[95] Table 4.5.8 shows the 14 largest employers in Merrimac in 2022. Town government and the regional school system play a significant role in employment. The largest employers in Merrimac are the public elementary schools, followed by the Town Fire and Water Department. The other largest employers come from a range of industries, including manufacturing, construction, retail, transportation, and information services.

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

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

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
Kenoza 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

**This includes on-call firefighters who are paid per call.*
Source: Massachusetts Department of Economic Research ES-202 Employment and Wages Data 2022

A commercial development in Merrimac Square

Tax Base

Merrimac has the second lowest per capita tax levy among nearby communities for Fiscal Year 2023, as seen at Figure 4.5.6. According to the Massachusetts Department of Revenue data shown at Table 4.5.9, 96.2 percent of Merrimac's tax levy is from residential taxes, the second highest rate among its adjacent communities.

In Fiscal Year 2023, Merrimac's total tax levy was $17 million.[96] 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, Merrimac does not have a split tax system, and all forms of property are assessed at the same rate.

Merrimac's higher than average tax rates, and lower than average tax levy (the amount the town receives is as taxes) is due to Merrimac's low assessed property values. The assessed value of a property is how much the town determines that piece of property is worth. Merrimac has the lowest property values among its neighbors. Merrimac's total residential assessed value, the assessed value of all residential property in town, is 37 percent lower than the regional average, and its

Figure 4.5.6 Tax Levy Per Capita

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

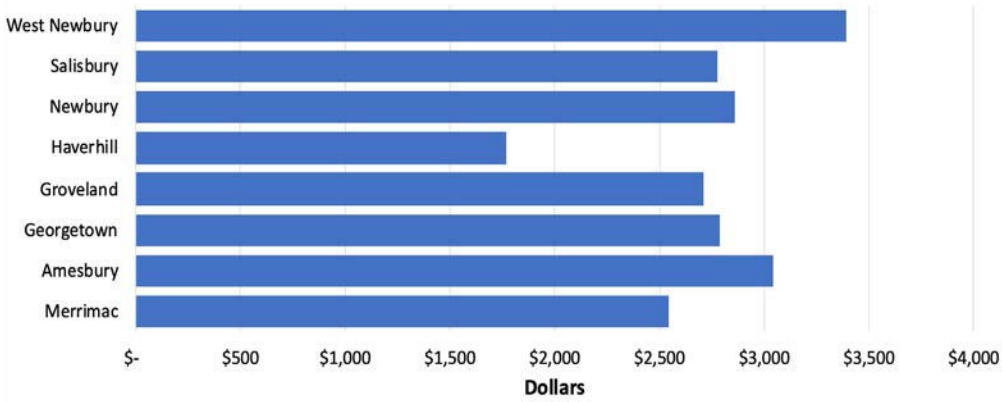
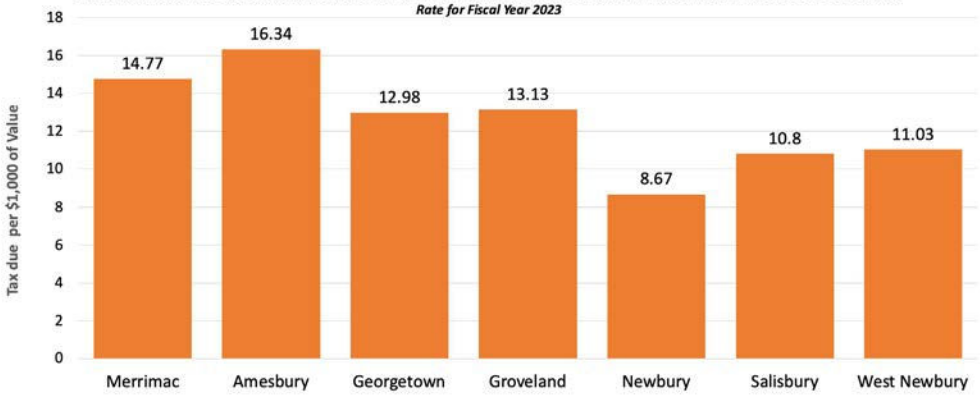


Figure 4.5.7 Tax Rate By Class for Fiscal Year 2023

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue Services, Division of Local Services Data Analytics and Resources Bureau DOR Databank Tax Rate for Fiscal Year 2023



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

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							

commercial, industrial and personal property assessments are over 20 percent lower.[97] As with most residential communities, Merrimac's total assessed value derives from its residential properties, making up 96 percent of all assessed value in town.

Local Policies and Practices

ZONING

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

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

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING EFFORTS

Merrimac has no designated economic development position or department, and no boards or committees primarily focus on economic development. This limits the Town's ability to conduct economic development planning internally. The only current local plan that addresses Economic Development is the 2002 Master Plan. The 2002 Master Plan contained five policies for Economic Development, focused on:[98]

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

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

- The Merrimack Valley Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 2023-2028 was completed in 2023 and comprises a number of recommendations and goals for economic development in the Merrimack Valley.[99]
- The Merrimack Valley Priority Growth Strategy identified two areas in Merrimac determined to be priority development areas (PDAs). PDAs are areas the MVPC determined would be appropriate for growth based on zoning, infrastructure, access, limited environmental impacts and input from the community each PDA is located in. The two PDA in Merrimac are:[100]
    - Merrimac Square, defined as the 18-acre Village Center, as a PDA of regional significance.
    - Merrimac Route 110, defined as the land east of Merrimac Square, between Route 110 and I-495, as a PDA of local significance.

Economic Opportunity Areas

Merrimac is part of the Northern Essex Regional Economic Target Area (ETA).[101] 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. The Town's inclusion within the Northern Essex ETA allows Merrimac to apply for an EOA, should there be an area that meets the criteria.

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

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

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

101 State of Massachusetts (2024) Economic Target Areas by Name. Accessed January 2024. https://www.mass.gov/doc/alphbetical-listing-of-eta-municipalities/download

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.[102]

102 Merrimac Valley Planning Commission, We Are MV, About. Accessed January 2024. https://wearemv.com/about-us/

Haverhill Bank and Journey Insurance Agency Incorporated

Merrimack Valley Transit (MeVa) bus. Photo credit: The Daily News of Newburyport.

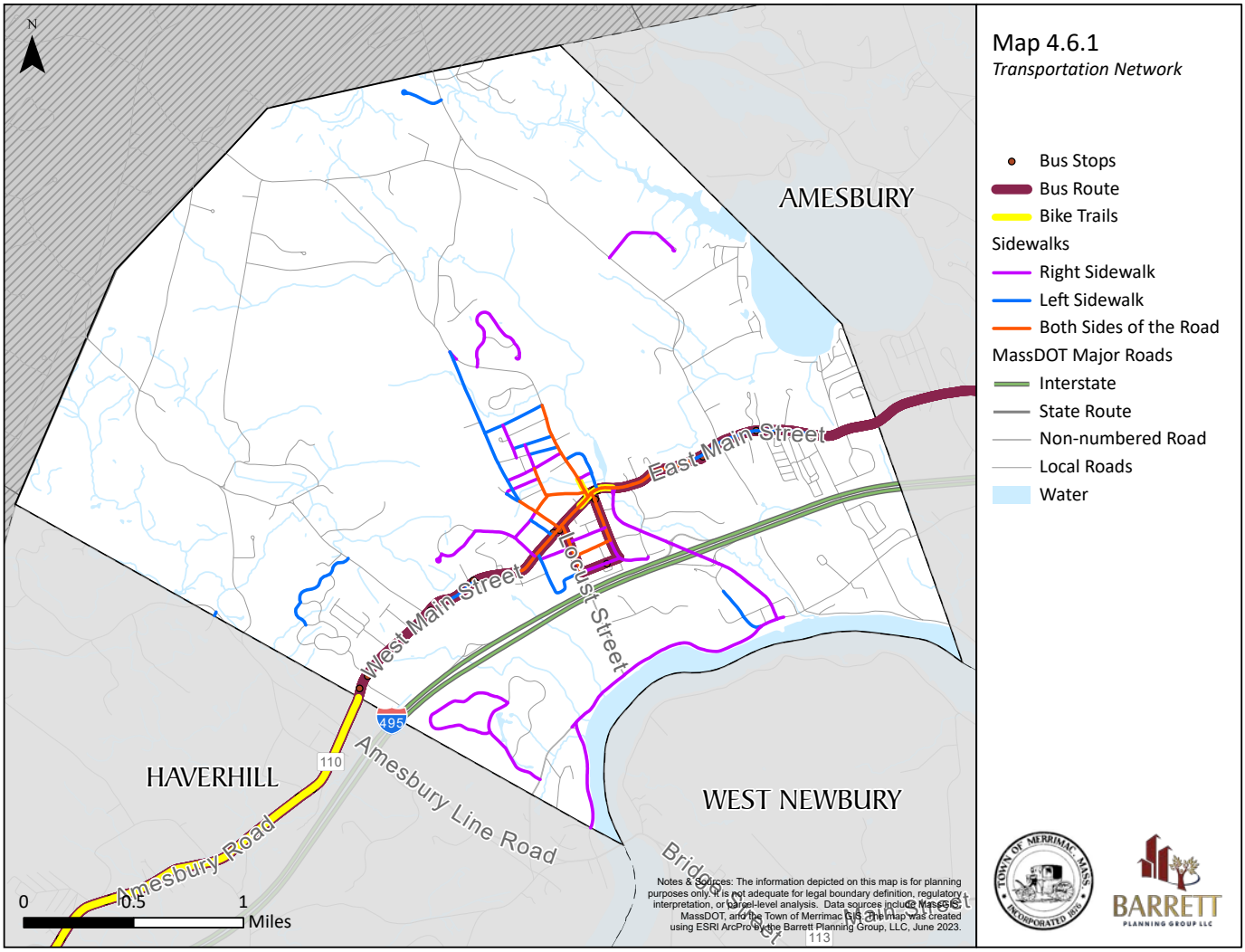
4.6 Transportation

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 Amesbury, Haverhill, and Newton, New Hampshire. 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).[103]

103 Formerly Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority (MVRTA).



Existing Conditions

TRAFFIC CIRCULATION

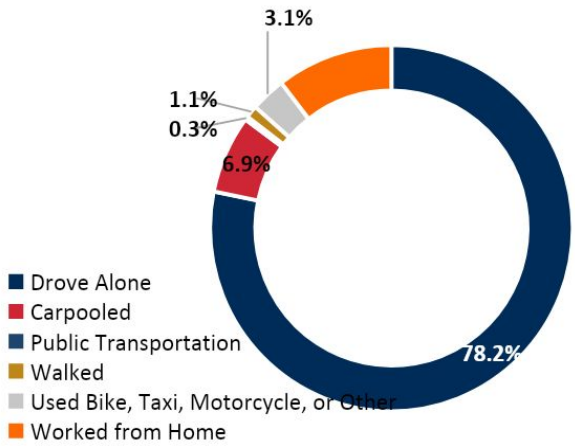
Commuting

Town residents frequently describe Merrimac as a bedroom community, meaning the town is largely residential, and most residents commute to work outside of town.[104] 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 including those who carpool with others. Additionally, 95 percent of employed residents have access to a private vehicle, and over 82 percent have access to two or more cars.

Commuting characteristics have changed over time, but most notably due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has impacted office work and significantly influenced commuting behavior. In 2020, Authorities encouraged social distancing measures to limit physical interactions and proximity with one another to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the community.[105] Subsequently, remote work rose, but public transit ridership was impacted the most and declined dramatically since 2020. According to census estimates, 10.4 percent of employed residents of Merrimac worked from home in 2021, slightly up from 10.2 percent in 2019. Only 0.3 percent utilized public transportation in 2021, drastically less than 2.7 percent in 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



Road Infrastructure

The Town of Merrimac has a total of 48.7 miles of roads as recorded in the Massachusetts Department of Transportation's (MassDOT) 2022 Road Inventory, shown in Table 4.6.1. The road miles refer to the number of centerline miles, which the

Table 4.6.1 Classification of Roads in Merrimac

	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.

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

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

report defines as the linear length of a road segment. For divided highways, such as I-495, only the length of one side of the roadway is counted to avoid redundancy. Lane miles refer to the total linear length of all travel lanes of a road segment, and do not include shoulders or auxiliary lanes. This is a closer measure of how much of the roads are available to accommodate vehicle trips and provides a better sense of the extent of the transportation network.

I-495 is the town's primary roadway to travel to Amesbury to the east and Haverhill to the west in terms of traffic volume. It connects to the north-south I-95 near the east side of Amesbury as well as the north-south I-93 west of Lawrence to provide access to and from Boston.

Arterials

Arterial roads are the highest-capacity road classification underneath interstates and limited-access freeways. They are designed for a high level of service between urban centers and connect traffic from lower-capacity collector roads to the freeways. Route 110 serves as the principal local travel corridor running east to west, cutting through Merrimac and intersecting with Broad, Liberty, Church, and School Streets at the Town Center. Along the interstate, this route delivers traffic to and from nearby Amesbury and Haverhill. Outside of Merrimac, the entire extent of Route 110 connects nearby Massachusetts towns and cities: Lowell, Lawrence, Haverhill, Merrimac, Amesbury, and Salisbury, to name a few. MassDOT considers most of Route 110 within Merrimac to be in "good" condition following the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Present Serviceability Rating (PSR).[106,107]FHWA defines road pavement as being in "good" condition if it is smooth and sufficiently free of cracks and patches. Another significant arterial, the Broad Street segment, links Route 110 to I-495, acting as both the entrance to the town center for travelers arriving from I-495 and the exit from town for those traveling outside of Merrimac via the interstate. These streets are under the town's jurisdiction, save for Route 110, a state-owned roadway.

Table 4.6.2 Top 10 Roads by AADT in Merrimac

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

Source: MassDOT

Collector roads

Underneath arterials are collector roads, which fall under the town's jurisdiction and connect local roads to arterials. They support lower traffic capacities but are more accessible, as they usually run alongside development and properties where traffic can enter and exit the roadway. According to MassDOT, collector roads include but are not limited to River Road by the river east of Locust Street, Church Street feeding traffic into Merrimac Square, Bear Hill Road connecting Route 110 north to the New Hampshire border, and Broad Street south of I-495 leading to the river.

Local roads

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

106 MassDOT, "2020 Pavement Condition."
107 Federal Highway Administration, "Present Serviceability Rating Computation from Reported Distresses," March 2021.

Traffic Volumes
The standard measure for traffic volume is known as the annual average daily traffic (AADT). This is calculated by tracking the total number of vehicles traveling through a road segment during a given year and dividing by 365. Table 4.6.2 shows the annual average daily traffic (AADT) volumes for the ten busiest roads in Merrimac recorded by MassDOT. The busiest corridor is I-495, followed by Route 110, which includes West and East Main Streets. The vast majority of traffic occurring within town is on I-495, with an AADT of over 60,000 vehicles per day.

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

Traffic Safety
MassDOT's Crash Data covering 2013 through October 2023 documented 857 crashes in Merrimac. It is important to note that this data only includes reported collisions and provides no information for unreported crashes. In these reported crashes, 1,243 vehicles were involved, and 236 people suffered injuries. Of those injuries, forty-six were serious, and eight were fatal.[108] This data also includes collisions involving pedestrians, cyclists, and other non-motorized users of the road. In the ten-year period from 2013 to 2023, six collisions involved pedestrians, and six other collisions involved cyclists. One of these collisions resulted in a fatality on Bartlett Street between Broad and School Streets in July 2023.

The vast majority of these collisions occurred on I-495 and Route 110, with four fatal injuries on I-495 and two fatalities on Route 110. The largest cluster of collisions is near the town center in and around Merrimac Square's roundabout.[109] No fatal injuries resulted from those collisions. While I-495 is not under the town's jurisdiction, Merrimac Police and Fire Department respond to crashes that occur on the interstate.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

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

108 In this case, "serious" injury is when the victim is incapacitated but did not suffer a fatal injury.
109 This data also includes collisions before the reconstruction of Merrimac Square from a 4-way intersection to a roundabout.

All local fixed routes and paratransit services are fare-free as of March 2022. This two-year program is funded by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).[110,111]

Passengers can travel west to the MBTA Haverhill Station for the Haverhill Commuter Rail Line or east to the Newburyport Station for the Newburyport/Rockport Commuter Rail Line to reach Boston in approximately one hour. The one-way fare for the Commuter Rail to Boston's North Station is $11.00 from Haverhill and $12.25 from Newburyport as of 2023. People with disabilities, 65 and older, middle and high school students, and young adults (age 18-25) with low income are eligible for reduced fares. Children 11 years and younger, people who are legally blind, military personnel, police and firefighters, and Department of Public Utilities employees are offered free service.[112]

Paratransit and ADA

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

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

BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Sidewalks and Paths

There are over fourteen miles of sidewalks in town. One notable sidewalk improvement project was completed in late 2015. The Town completed its Town Square Construction Project for Merrimac Square after a 12-year-long process.[113,114] This redesign reconstructed its previous offset four-way intersection to its current rotary intersection for East and West Main Streets, Church Street, and School Street. This project addressed traffic flow and safety issues and constructed 2,500 feet of ADA-compliant sidewalks for pedestrians and users with disabilities. The Town continues to explore opportunities to improve pedestrian networks by adding more miles of sidewalks and implementing accessibility features such as curb cuts.

110 Merrimack Valley Transit.

111 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.

112 Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority.

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

114 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/.

However, residents voiced concerns about the lack of safe pedestrian infrastructure elsewhere in town. They referenced deteriorating and missing sidewalks further from the center of town, particularly along River Road, where pedestrians and cyclists like to travel for recreation and scenic views. Additionally, there is a lack of a pedestrian network to provide public access to these scenic routes and connect residents to important points of interest, such as institutions such as schools and public transit via walking.

The Town's Commission on Disabilities works to add and improve pedestrian infrastructure in town. The Institute for Human Centered Design (IHCD) prepared an ADA Transition Plan in September 2021 that outlines existing conditions for pedestrians and makes recommendations for ADA compliance for buildings and sidewalks. An estimated 11.2 percent of Merrimac residents have a disability. These include difficulties with hearing, vision, cognition, walking, self-care, and independence. Nearly a quarter of residents aged 65 and over live with a disability.[115] It is crucial to provide the physical infrastructure that supports these populations, following town goals to foster a safe, accessible, and equitable environment for all residents.

Bicycle Network and Facilities

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

Local Policies and Practices

According to a recent pavement study by the Merrimac DPW, the total cost of needed road repairs in Merrimac is about $11 million, for which they received only a partial amount in grant funding. One key funding sources for local road repairs is the state's Chapter 90 program, which allocates annual funds for all Massachusetts cities and towns based on factors such as the community's population and total length of roads. Over the last decade Merrimac's annual Chapter 90 funds have remained largely consistent at just under $200,000, despite significant increases in labor and materials costs as well as inflation over the same period.[116] Therefore keeping up with maintenance on existing roads is challenging, let alone building new transportation and pedestrian infrastructure. If this challenge persists, roads and sidewalks may continue to deteriorate.

The Merrimack Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MVMPO) manages grant funding and develops transportation plans for the Merrimack Valley region, including the Town of Merrimac. MVMPO is made up of staff from the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC) and is the region's transportation policy board. In late 2023, they released Merrimack Valley Vision 2050 (MV Vision 2050), their

115 U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates. Table S1810.
116 MassDOT, "Chapter 90 past apportionment," https://www.mass.gov/info-details/chapter-90-past-apportionment (accessed August 2024).

metropolitan transportation plan (MTP) that builds upon their 2020 MTP and encompasses other plans to envision a safe, equitable, accessible, sustainable, and cost-effective multi-modal transportation system for Merrimack Valley. It outlines several objectives and strategies for implementing ideas to achieve these goals.[117]

The projects that are included in MV Vision 2050 are eligible to be funded by the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The TIP is a capital plan that provides federal funding for transportation projects, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, highway safety, and other transportation-related projects over a five-year period. MVMPO manages the TIP for the region. The Town of Merrimac currently has no project approved by TIP in Federal Fiscal Years (FFY) 2024 to 2028 but has expressed interest in TIP funding for four projects for which they have submitted applications: Mill Street ($2.07 million), Church Street ($3 million), McLaren Trail ($10 million), and Route 110 Reconstruction ($43 million).[118,119]

MVPC's 2020 Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan identifies unmet transportation needs for seniors and people with disabilities in the Merrimack Valley region and identifies strategies for addressing those needs. This Coordinated Plan is tied to the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) 5310 grant program, allowing MeVa to receive federal funding to improve public transit accessibility.[120]

Additionally, MVMPO first completed their Merrimack Valley Active Transportation Plan (ATP), MV Moves, in 2015 and lays out a region-wide vision for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure improvements, including specific priorities for each municipality. MVMPO updated this plan to inform and integrate into MV Vision 2050, and began implementation in late 2023.[121]

MVPC also developed a Vision Zero Plan supported by the federal Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) grant program in 2023. The plan provides guidance towards a future of zero traffic-related deaths and injuries, while improving safety, equity, and mobility for all users.[122]

117 Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, "Merrimack Valley Vision 2050: Metropolitan Transportation Plan."
118 Ibid.
119 Merrimack Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization, "Transportation Improvement Program: Federal Fiscal Years 2024-2028."
120 Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, "Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan," April 22, 2020.
121 Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, "MV Moves: Merrimack Valley Active Transportation Plan."
122 Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, "Merrimack Valley Vision Zero."

MERRIMAC FIRE DEPARTMENT
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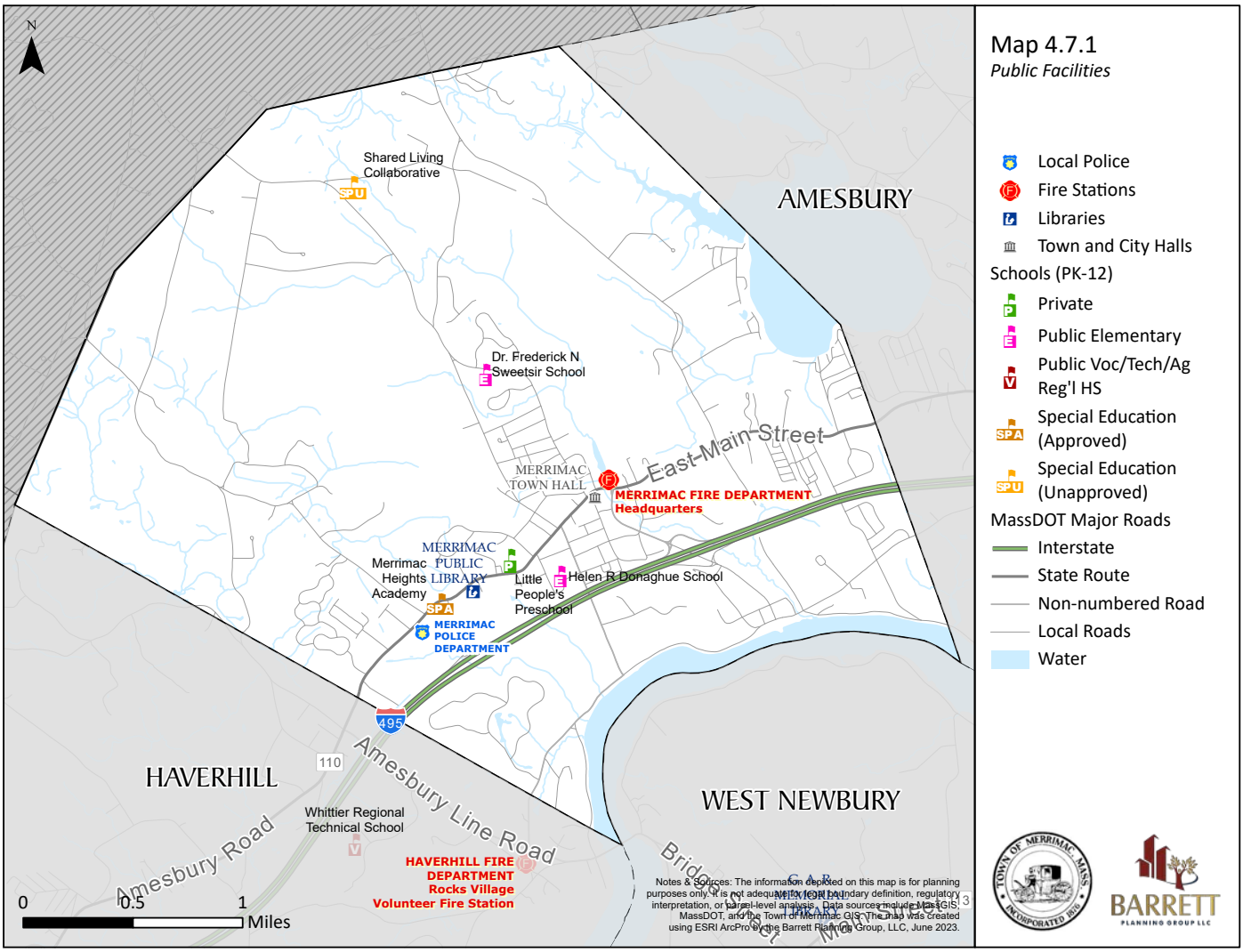
4.7 Community Facilities and Services

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.

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.

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

Public Access Television

Merrimac TV is a private nonprofit formed in 2007 and is overseen by the Board of Selectmen. Funding for Merrimac TV comes entirely from a contract between Comcast and the Town, where the Town receives 4.5 percent of Comcast's local gross revenues.[123]

It is charged with the responsibility of establishing procedures to facilitate and oversee the availability of access channel resources to the residents of the Town. It provides training on, and access to video production equipment and facilities as well as other communication technologies, and channel/broadcast time on the local cable television system. There are two full-time staff, a station manager and technical director.

Department of Public Works

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

Solid Waste and Recycling

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

123 Merrimac TV, About, Accessed January 2024. "About." merrimactv.com.

Table 4.7.1: Town Buildings and Facilities		
Building	**Address**	**Other Departments Housed**
Town Hall	2 School St.	Board of Assessors; Finance Dept; Town Accountant; Board of Health; Inspectional Services; Public Access Television; Town Clerk; Tax Collector; Town Administrator, Finance Department, Select Board, Planning Board
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		

According to the 2022 Recycling and Solid Waste Survey, Merrimac serves 1,223 households for curbside trash collection and 1,895 households for bi-weekly curbside recycling. The school district has a separate contract for trash and recycling from the school facilities. The amount of trash collected in Merrimac in 2022, including materials collected from residents and municipal buildings was 638 tons, which includes bulky waste.[124] Single stream recyclables for 2022 totaled 603 tons and yard waste 42 tons. Merrimac does not host comprehensive household hazardous waste collection events or provide any type of food waste service.

Fewer households are using municipal trash collection in 2022 than in 2012 or 2017 while the number of households serviced by the town for recycling has remained about the same for the past five years. Accordingly, the volume of recyclables has increased from 429 tons to 603 tons from 2017 to 2022, whereas the volume of trash has decreased slightly.

Inspectional Services

The Inspectional Services Department is comprised of the Building Commissioner and an Administrative Coordinator. The department handles building and land use permitting, and provide some staff support to the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals, although both boards also have their own administrative assistants. The department also provides electrical, plumbing and gas, and mechanical inspections on a regular basis. The Building Commissioner is charged with enforcing compliance with the MA State Building Code and Merrimac's local zoning bylaw.

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

Public Library

The Merrimac Public Library is a member of the Merrimack Valley Library Consortium (MVLC), an alliance of over 35 public libraries serving the Greater Merrimack Valley region of Massachusetts. The library staff consists of the Library Director

124 Mass.gov, "Recycling & Solid Waste Data for Massachusetts Cities & Towns," 2022 Municipal Solid Waste & Recycling Survey Responses, accessed January 30, 2024.

and a coordinator for youth and adult services in addition to four other employees. Over 3,300 Merrimac residents have library cards including 304 new cards that were issued in 2022.[125] A number of projects enhanced the outdoor library grounds in 2022, including the Story Walk that was installed as an Eagle Scout project; a Pollinator Garden implemented in collaboration with students and teachers from Whittier Tech, the Merrimac Garden Club, the Friends of the Library, and library staff; birdhouses in the children's garden were refurbished; and the Garden Club installed a "Gratitude Tree," a wooden tree-like sculpture.[126]

The library works to provide materials and programs for all ages and interests and has made a conscious effort to diversify the collection and programming to ensure it is inclusive and accessible. Other publicly accessible amenities include a meeting room, copier, and fax machines.[127]

Senior Center and Council on Aging

The mission of the Merrimac Council on Aging is "to provide services designed to improve the quality of life of elders by assisting them to remain as physically mobile, mentally alert, and socially active as possible. The COA advocates for older adults, manages the resources needed to develop services, provides education for seniors and their families regarding choices in their care and community services available to them."[128]

Staff includes an executive director, program coordinator, food & nutrition director, outreach & human services coordinator, transportation coordinator/van driver, volunteer coordinator, kitchen chef, COA senior aide, custodian/van driver, volunteer food pantry coordinator.[129] Transportation is provided through the Senior Center by volunteers (Northern Essex Elder Transportation - NEET) as well as Van Drivers. The Senior Center parking lot was repaved in 2002 with new lines and handicap accessible spaces.

Board of Health

The Merrimac Board of Health is a three-member body responsible for local administration of a wide variety of public health regulations, including Title V septic system regulations and restaurant health inspections. The Board of Health staff consists of a Public Health Agent, a part-time administrative assistant, and a part-time Public Health Nurse. The Health Agent's responsibilities include inspections of housing, food establishments, wells, septic, and water complaints. The administrative assistant carries out duties that include permits for food vendors, septic permits, and licenses. The Public Health Nurse holds twice-monthly blood pressure and health clinics aimed at seniors, oversees a Used Sharps Collection Program, and keeps citizens up to date with current health information via a monthly Senior Center newsletter column.

Veterans' Services

Merrimac is part of a Regional Veteran's Intermunicipal Agreement with Amesbury, Newburyport, and Salisbury that provides emergency financial assistance to financially qualified veterans or their families in accordance with G.L. Chapter 115. Any money expended to these veterans under Chapter 115 is returned to the Town by

125 Town of Merrimac 2022 Annual Report. Report of Library Board of Trustees.
126 Town of Merrimac 2022 Annual Report. Report of Library Director, Kelly Unsworth.
127 Ibid.
128 Town of Merrimac, "Senior Center/Council on Aging", accessed January 30, 2024. Senior Center/ Council on Aging - Town of Merrimac, MA
129 Town of Merrimac, "Senior Center/Council on Aging", accessed January 30, 2024. Senior Center/ Council on Aging - Town of Merrimac, MA

HONORING ALL
WHO HAVE SERVED

the State at a rate of $0.75 to the dollar expended.[130] In FY2022, approximately $90,100 was expended to eligible Merrimac veterans and their families, of which $67,575 will be returned to the Town by the State of Massachusetts.

The Veterans Services office also assisted and secured various VA medical benefits for service and non-service-connected veterans. These medical benefits included short and long-term medical treatments at the VA satellite Clinic in Haverhill and VA Hospitals in the surrounding area. Another service provided by this department is assisting veterans seeking benefits from the Social Security Administration.

Public School Facilities

Merrimac is part of the Pentucket Regional School District along with Groveland, and West Newbury. The district includes four elementary schools, a middle school, and a senior high school, shown in Table 4.7.2. Two of these facilities, the Dr. Frederick N. Sweetsir School (serving students Pre-K through second grade) and Helen R. Donaghue School (grades 3 through 6), are located in Merrimac. The Middle School and High School share a building centrally located in West Newbury, with administrative offices also housed in the complex. Most elementary school students attend a school in the town where they live.[131] While some secondary age students attend the nearby vocational school, the high school accommodates the majority of the district's secondary age youth.

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
Dr. Elmer S Bagnall School	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**	

Source: MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School and District Profiles 2024

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

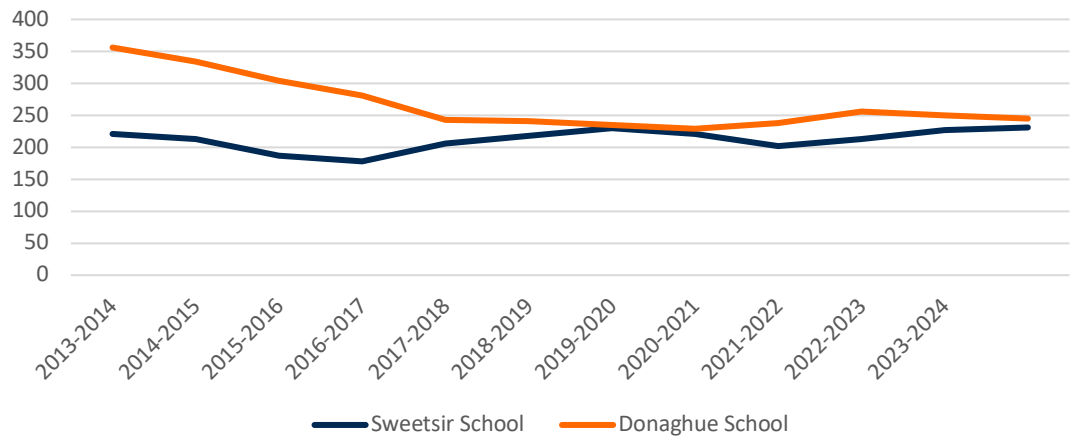
130 Town of Merrimac 2022 Annual Report. Letter from Kevin Hunt, Director of Veterans Services.
131 Pentucket Regional School District, www.prsd.org.

HELEN R. DONAGHUE SCHOOL
PLEASE

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.

Figure 4.7.1: Enrollment in Merrimac's Public Schools

Source:*Source: MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School and District Profiles 2024*



Pentucket Regional Middle & High Schools

Combined school enrollment for the regional middle and high schools was 905 students in 2023. The year prior, there were 314 total students from Merrimac attending both schools. A new school building housing Pentucket Regional Middle and High Schools as well as administrative offices was constructed in 2022, and students moved into the new building starting in the 2023 school year.[132]

Whittier Regional Vocational Technical School

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

Emergency Services

Fire

The mission of the Merrimac Fire Department is to provide quality fire, rescue, and emergency medical services to the public and promote customer satisfaction as well as conduct fire safety programs to the students with the Merrimac schools, local groups, and other interested organizations. In 1974, the Town purchased the Merrimac Fire Station located at 16 East Main Street. Following extensive rehabilitation, the Merrimac Police, Fire, and Highway Departments moved into the building in 1976. Originally constructed in the early 1900s, as an old trolley car barn, it later underwent conversion to a bus barn known as the Mass Northeastern Bus Lines after the era of the trolleys. In the early 1960s, a construction company acquired the building to

132 Annual Town Report 2022, Town of Merrimac

utilize it for housing and repairing its equipment during the construction of Interstate 495.[133] This transformation of one building over time highlights the adaptive reuse of structures to meet the changing needs of the community. The decision by the Town to purchase and rehabilitate the building in 1974, further underscores the community's commitment to preserving its history and repurposing valuable structures.
The Fire Station has undergone significant improvements in the last five years. The Town, in collaboration with the Fire Department staff, has made considerable strides in enhancing the working environment. This includes addressing issues such as mold, mildew, and accumulated filth. More recently, the Town allocated funds to address roof problems in the aging building. Recently, the Town secured a Green Communities Grant for sustainable heating and air conditioning systems, particularly targeting outdated or non-existent systems. The overall condition of the building envelope requires attention, including repointing and addressing sections of the brick.[134]

The Fire Department has six full-time employees including the Fire Chief and one part-time administrative worker, but the bulk of the members (24) are on-call, meaning they only are at the station when they are notified there is a need for help.[135] The department has two fire engines, one ambulance, a fire rescue board, and two fire/EMT trucks.

Since the chief assumed his position, the call volume has skyrocketed, experiencing a forty percent increase in the last year. In 2022, the Fire Department members responded to 1,503 calls for aid, which was a 30 percent increase over the previous year's 1,192 calls and a 50 percent increase in two years. The Fire Department staff has exceeded the NFPA 1720 standard that states a department must have 10

A view of the Merrimac Water Works Building

133 Merrimac Fire Department, "About", "Station History", accessed January 30, 2024. About – Merrimac Fire Department
134 Larry Fisher (Fire Chief, Town of Merrimac, MA), interview by , interview by Sarah Maren, Barrett Planning Group, August 30, 2023.
135 Town of Merrimac 2022 Annual Report. Letter written by Larry Fisher, Fire Chief, Emergency Management Director.

members in 10 minutes on a scene 80 percent of the time. Merrimac has met that standard 98 percent of the time when staffed in-house and 81 percent of the time when unstaffed. The last six months of 2023 witnessed the highest number of calls ever experienced in any six-month period in the history of the department, placing strain on staff capacity.[136]

Police

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

During COVID the Merrimac Police Department saw a decrease in calls for service. In 2022, the department experienced a seven percent increase in calls for service. This is attributed to both an increase in officer-initiated activity and an increase in calls for service.[137]

The department's staffing approach differs from other departments, with officers working 12-hour shifts due to the limited number of personnel. To ensure increased coverage, the department operates as two separate entities, each overseen by a sergeant. This arrangement aims to maintain a consistent availability of at least two offers to respond to calls. Animal Control services are provided by the police department.

Infrastructure and Utilities

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

Water

The Merrimac Water Department Pump Station was established in 1973 when six wells were installed on Bear Hill Road and a 460,000-gallon water storage tank was also constructed. The Water Plant on Wallace Way was built in 1991. Today, the Merrimac Water Department maintains two groundwater supply (well water) sources at two separate locations. The Wallace Way Wellfield, situated off East Main Street, operates with an approved pumping rate of 240 gallons per minute (gpm). The Bear Hill wellfields, located off Bear Hill Road on the Newton NH Line, has an approved pumping rate of 280 gpm.[138]

Water filtration is conducted to eliminate small particles and organisms such as sediment, algae, and bacteria. The Town's distributed water consistently meets or exceeds the primary drinking water guidelines and regulations set by the United

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

137 own of Merrimac 2022 Annual Report. Report of the Police Chief, Eric M. Shears.

138 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

States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP). These tests include monthly evaluations for bacterial contamination, while assessments for other contaminants are performed annually or as determined by MassDEP's frequency requirements. All test results are reported to MassDEP for monitoring and regular compliance.[139]

In 2001, MassDEP approved a Zone II Delineation for the Bear Hill-Sargent's Pit Well, estimating the area of contribution for the well. Merrimac's Zone II Delineation comprises primarily forest and residential land uses, with a smaller portion dedicated to agricultural activities. Under the MassDEP's Source Water Assessment and Protection (SWAP) program, Zone II delineations were finalized in July 1999 and December 2000. These SWAP reports evaluate the susceptibility of the public water supply to potential contamination sources, with MassDEP assessing the Wells' susceptibility as moderate.[140] To protect the Town's water sources, gate access has been implemented, allowing entry only to authorized personnel.

The Town continues its water meter replacement program to ensure both accurate readings and safe water, streamlining quarterly readings to reduce required man hours. A comprehensive hydrant inventory has been concluded, with the Town strategizing to allocate funds for the replacement or rehabilitation of aging hydrants. In 2022, the Town also had Underwater Solutions conduct a Sanitary and Security survey for the water tanks.[141]

139 Merrimac Water Department. 2022 Drinking Water Quality Report, Issued April 2023, 1. 2022-Water-Quality-Report.pdf (townofmerrimac.com)
140 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
141 Annual Report of the Merrimac Water Department for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30th, 2022. Robert Sinibaldi, Building Commissioner/Zoning Compliance Officer/DPW Director.

One of the Merrimac Public Works Department's Municipal Vehicles

Collaborating with the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), efforts are underway to increase the water pumping capacity that was originally set in 1974. Permits are being sought from DEP to commence the replacement of Bear Hill's 40+ year old 8" wells, upgrading them to 12" wells. Notably, the Town finalized the water main upgrade on East Main Street from 6" to 12" in coordination with the Crossing Way development, boosting fire flow protection and water quality for areas east of Wallace Way.[142] A project funded by American Recovery Protection Act (ARPA) grants completed the Bear Hill Water Main upgrade from Sargent Farm to Abbey Road, from a 6" main to a 12" main.[143]

Public Sewer

The Wastewater Department, a part of the DPW, maintains Merrimac's public sewer system. In fiscal year 2022, the Town connected eleven new homes to its sewer system, elevating the total number of connections to 2,115. The Wastewater Department continues efforts to maintain compliance with its National Pollutant Discharge Permit. These included collection system investigations aimed at identifying sources of inflow and infiltration (I&I), repairing and eliminating I&I sources, conducting educational public outreach programs, engineering assessments of new sewer connections and extensions, testing of these extensions, and ongoing collection system mapping.[144]

Additionally, a Facilities Plan for the Wastewater Treatment Facility was finalized in 2022. Due to the facility's age, the plan identified significant improvements crucial to maintaining its proper operation and ensuring the facility's capability to process and treat the wastewater generated by the Town in the future. These improvements are necessary to sustain the facility's functionality and efficacy.

Electric Light Service

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

The MMLD is a revenue generating entity that aims to maintain stable and affordable electric rates and keep up with the maintenance, expansion, and modernization of the electrical distribution system. During 2022, twenty-eight new electrical services were added to the electric distribution system.[145] MMLD supplies power to 3,143 meters throughout town, both commercial and residential, and operates streetlights.[146] The MMLD has two facilities: the customer service center at 10 West Main Street and an indoor garage at 20 Federal Way.

MMLD receives 7.5 percent of power from the solar field in town. Massachusetts requires that the power MMLD purchases for distribution is 50 percent carbon free by 2030. Energy conservation programs include providing rebates for qualified en-

142 Ibid.
143 Merrimac Water Department. 2022 Drinking Water Quality Report, Issued April 2023, 6. 2022-Water-Quality-Report.pdf (townofmerrimac.com)
144 Annual Report of the Merrimac Wastewater Department for Fiscal Year Ending June 30th, 2022. Robert Sinibaldi, Building Commissioner/Zoning Compliance Officer/DPW Director.
145 Merrimac Municipal Light Department 2022 Annual Report, 1.
146 Interview with Mary Usovicz, General Manager of MMLC, August 30, 2023.

ergy-efficient appliances. In 2022, customers obtained $6,000 in rebates. Another energy conservation project was the conversion of rental streetlights to municipal-owned street LED lights.

Municipal Government & Administration

Select Board

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

Town Meeting

Like most Massachusetts towns, Merrimac uses an Open Town Meeting system, allowing residents to vote directly on proposed articles. Town Meeting is held the last Monday in April, and a Special Town Meeting is held the third Monday in October as needed The Select Board determine the contents of the Town Meeting warrant, and the Town Moderator is responsible for running the meeting.

Finance Department, Treasurer, and Finance Committee

The Finance Department is vital to the Town's daily operations, as it handles payroll, processing contracts, preparing budgets, paying all bills, and procuring all services. The Town Accountant, appointed by the Select Board, works in the Finance Department to maintain all municipal financial records and ensure that the Town remains in compliance with federal and state regulations.

In Merrimac, the Finance Director is also appointed the Treasurer and Town Administrator, the person responsible for the day-to-day function of municipal government. As head of the Finance Department, the Director's responsibilities include providing high quality financial, accounting, and administrative services, preparing the annual Town Budget, keeping financial records, and setting procurement procedures.[147] The position's administrative duties include advising the Select Board and Town departments on personnel issues, coordinating between the various Town departments, and implementation of local policy, including financial policy.

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

Town Accountant

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

Assessors Department and Board of Assessors

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

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

The Board of Assessors is a three-member board elected directly by the public for three-year terms. Their primary responsibility is to maintain an accurate and up-to-date record of the assessed value of every property in Merrimac, which in turn determines the annual property tax levy. All property values are updated yearly. The Town uses Patriot Properties as its online Assessors Records platform.

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

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

The Committee approved about $480,000 in capital planning requests for fiscal year 2024. Major projects that the Town is currently paying off debt from include the new police station and the Pentucket Regional School District's Middle/High School project.[148]

Municipal Budget (Tax Levy, Expenditures)

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

Table 4.7.3 shows the Town's general expenditures for fiscal year 2023. Education spending is the largest category by far, followed by public safety which includes funding for both the police and fire departments. Over the past five years, Merrimac's annual budget has increased by over $4 million while the distribution of funds across the categories in Table 4.7.3 has remained largely consistent.[149]

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%**

Source: Municipal Databank, MA Dept. of Revenue, Division of Local Services

148 Town of Merrimac, Mass., Report of the Capital Planning Committee FY2022
149 Municipal Databank, MA Dept. of Revenue, Division of Local Services

6. Implementation Plan

This Implementation Program presents a series of actions designed to guide the Town towards meeting goals and addressing key issues identified in this Master Plan. Actions may relate to multiple Master Plan Goals, but for ease of use are associated with one primary goal with other applicable elements noted.

Guiding Implementation

Upon the successful adoption of a new Master Plan, many towns establish a Master Plan Implementation Committee (MPIC) charged with meeting regularly throughout the plan's lifespan to guide implementation efforts.

Merrimac has a solid basis for an Implementation Committee in the Master Plan Working Group convened to guide the creation of this document. Merrimac's MPIC should have the same composition as the working group: liaisons from major boards and commissions (Select Board, Planning Board, Zoning Board, Open Space Committee, Affordable Housing Board of Trustees, etc.) as well as key staff members (Building Commissioner, Finance Director, Town Planner, etc.). This group will represent the various interests of Merrimac residents as well as the departments and boards responsible for implementing the Master Plan's recommendations.

The MPIC charge should be to meet two to four times per year to check in on the Town's progress in implementing the Master Plan, to encourage Town officials to prioritize appropriate Master Plan action items, and to educate the public about what is being done to implement the plan. As part of these duties the Committee should give one or two public presentations to the Select Board on implementation progress every year, and check in with Town Staff at their quarterly department head meetings.

Responsible Parties Abbreviations:
AHBT – Merrimac Affordable Housing Board of Trustees
ConsComm – Conservation Commission
DPW – Department of Public Works
HistComm – Historic Commission
OSC – Open Space Committee

Land Use

Goal: Create zoning regulations that promote commercial growth and development of desired housing types, focusing on redevelopment and prioritizing efficient and environmentally responsible use of land for new development.

#	Action	Relevant Master Plan Elements	Responsibility	Priority (High, Medium, Low, On-going)	Timeframe (1-3, 4-6, 7-10 years, or ongoing)	Resources Needed
LU1	Amend the Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) bylaw to provide more incentives to encourage its use, and allow density bonuses for affordable housing without age restrictions.	Housing, Natural Resources	Planning Board, Town Planner	Medium	1-3 years	Staff capacity
LU2	Amend the Zoning Bylaw to create a comprehensive wetlands protection district.	Natural Resources	Planning Board, Town Planner	Medium	4-6 years	Staff capacity
LU3	Establish an Open Space-Institutional Overlay District that encourages the development of cultural and recreational facilities and low-intensity economic development in designated areas of town.	Natural Resources	Planning Board, OSC, Cultural Council, Town Planner	Medium	4-6 years	Staff capacity
LU4	Promote the Rural Highway District on Route 110 as a desirable location for mixed-use development.	Economic Development	Town Planner	Ongoing	Ongoing	Staff capacity
LU5	Identify underutilized sites in and around Merrimac Square to target for re-development, prioritizing commercial uses (including mixed-use development).	Economic Development, Housing	Planning Board, Town Planner	Medium; Ongoing	Ongoing	Staff capacity
LU6	Amend the Village Center to encourage mixed use development and incorporate design guidelines for that use.	Economic Development, Housing	Planning Board, Town Planner	High	1-3 years	Staff capacity

Natural & Historic Resources

Goal: Preserve Merrimac's natural landscapes, water bodies, sensitive habitats, and historic neighborhoods. Enact responsible local regulations to prepare for impacts of climate change.

#	Action	Relevant Master Plan Elements	Responsibility	Priority (High, Medium, Low, Ongoing)	Timeframe (1-3, 4-6, 7-10 years, or ongoing)	Resources Needed
NHR1	Implement a demolition delay bylaw to prevent needless destruction of historically significant buildings.	Land Use	Planning Board, HistComm, Town Planner	Medium	1-3 years	Staff capacity
NHR2	Consider establishing local historic districts under G.L. Chapter 40C, particularly in Merrimac Square and along River Road in Merrimacport.	Land Use	HistComm	Low	4-6 years	Staff capacity
NHR3	Reconsider the merits of adopting the Community Preservation Act to provide funding for open space and historic preservation, as well as affordable housing.	Housing, Open Space	OSC, AHBT, HistComm	High	1-3 years	Staff capacity, public outreach
NHR4	Secure Article 97 conservation protection for Town Forest.	Natural Resources	OSC, Select Board	High	1-3 years	Technical support
NHR5	Continue to identify high-priority opportunities for preservation and conservation restrictions in partnership with nonprofit partners.	Land Use	ConsComm, OSC	Ongoing	Ongoing	
NHR6	Develop zoning to allow and encourage electric vehicle charging stations in appropriate areas of Town such as the Highway Services district.	Land Use, Economic Development	Planning Board, Town Planner	Medium	1-3 years	Staff capacity, consultant funding

Open Space & Recreation

Goal: Expand recreation opportunities on publicly owned land, maximize public access to open space areas, and work to preserve both new and traditional.

#	Action	Relevant Master Plan Elements	Responsibility	Priority (High, Medium, Low, Ongoing)	Timeframe (1-3, 4-6, 7-10 years, or ongoing)	Resources Needed
OSR1	Proactively support innovative agricultural proposals while working to support traditional farms in the area, potentially with the help of the Economic Development Commission (see action ED1)	Economic Development	Select Board	High; Ongoing	Ongoing	Staff capacity
OSR2	Develop a plan to create public recreational facilities at Emery Street Field.	Land Use, Community Facilities	OSC, DPW, Select Board	High	1-3 yrs	Consultant support
OSR3	Provide for maintenance of existing trails and other public open space lands via a line item in the annual Town Budget.	Land Use	OSC, ConsCom, DPW	Ongoing	Ongoing	Funding
OSR4	Encourage use and improve access to Merrimack River at bottom of Locust St. and Carey Park		Select Board, OSC	High	1-3 yrs	SB approval
OSR5	Update the Merrimac Open Space and Recreation Plan so the town can qualify for grants from the Division of Conservation Services.	Natural Resources	OSC	High	1-3 years	Consultant support

Housing

Goal: Provide affordable housing opportunities to meet local needs as well as the Town's obligations under state law. Continue to expand a diverse selection of housing types and preserve existing homes.

#	Action	Relevant Master Plan Elements	Responsi-bility	Priority (High, Medium, Low, Ongoing)	Timeframe (1-3, 4-6, 7-10 years, or ongoing)	Resources Needed
H1	Maintain an updated Housing Production Plan to proactively plan to meet Merrimac's affordable housing requirements under Chapter 40B.		Town Planner	High; ongoing	1-3 years; ongoing	Consultant support
H2	Develop a plan for complying with the MBTA Communities Law by the end of 2025. Work with the community to determine an area where at least 138 units of multifamily housing could be allowed by right.	Land Use	Planning Board, Town Planner	High	1-3 years	State technical assistance grants
H3	Identify town-owned land, including tax-title parcels, that can support small-scale affordable housing development by such organizations as Habitat for Humanity.	Land Use	AHBT, Select Board	Ongoing	Ongoing	Staff capacity
H4	Create density bonuses for providing affordable housing units for multifamily projects and larger subdivisions	Land Use	Planning Board	Medium	4-6 years	Staff capacity
H5	Explore and develop program to assist access to affordable housing administered by the Merrimac Housing Authority, using funds from the Affordable Housing Trust.		AHBT, Merrimac Housing Authority	Medium	1-3 years	Funding, program design
H6	Create an Inclusionary Zoning provision to require that multifamily housing projects above a certain size set aside affordable units.		Planning Board, Town Planner	High	1-3 years	Staff capacity
H7	Develop a zoning district to encourage the production of "starter homes," allowing the creation of smaller and less expensive units than a standard single-family dwelling.		Planning Board, Town Planner	Medium	4-6 years	Staff capacity

Economic Development

Goal: Work to retain Merrimac's local businesses and create vibrant commercial centers in Merrimac Square and along Route 110 to provide local retail and dining opportunities.

#	Action	Relevant Master Plan Elements	Responsi-bility	Priority (High, Medium, Low, Ongoing)	Timeframe (1-3, 4-6, 7-10 years, or ongoing)	Resources Needed
ED1	Revive Economic Development Commission to lead efforts to attract new businesses to the area, assist existing businesses, and promote Merrimac as a destination. The committee's focus should be on the identified "priority development areas" of Merrimac Square and the Route 110 corridor.		Select Board	High	1-3 years	Volunteer capacity, staff support
ED2	Form a committee to assess infrastructure upgrades needed to attract businesses to the PDA. In addition, the zoning for this area should be reviewed to consider allowing for more of a mix of uses.		Select Board	Medium	4-6 years	Volunteer capacity, staff support
ED3	Capitalize on Merrimac's inclusion in the Northern Essex Regional Economic Target Area – alongside Haverhill, Amesbury and Salisbury – to obtain resources for economic development.		Select Board, Town Planner	Ongoing	Ongoing	Staff capacity
ED4	Review regulations for the Rural Highway, Village Center, Office Industrial, and Highway Services to identify regulatory barriers to business growth.	Land Use	Select Board, Planning Board, Town Planner	High	1-3 years	Staff or consultant capacity

Transportation

Goal: Ensure safe and scenic road conditions, especially near major transit corridors Route 110 and I-495. Improve and expand non-automobile transit options to make walking and biking viable means to get across Merrimac.

#	Action	Relevant Master Plan Elements	Responsibility	Priority (High, Medium, Low, Ongoing)	Timeframe (1-3, 4-6, 7-10 years, or ongoing)	Resources Needed
T1	Identify priorities for road, sidewalk and pathway connections. High priority should be given to connecting existing sidewalks near Merrimac Square to major amenities (such as schools and outdoor recreation areas) and existing trails in Amesbury.		DPW, OSC	Medium; Ongoing	Ongoing	Staff capacity, project funding
T2	Adopt a comprehensive maintenance plan for sidewalks.		DPW	High; ongoing	1-3 years; ongoing	Project funding
T3	Study the viability of adding bicycle lanes and signage to key roads		DPW	Low	4-6 years	Project funding
T4	Develop a plan to enhance the town's gateways by making them both visually attractive and effective at communicating local traffic policies, including consistent signage.	Land Use, Facilities & Services	Planning Board, DPW, Town Planner	Low	4-6 years	Staff capacity, project funding
T5	Encourage flexible street and sidewalk designs appropriate to locale.	Land Use	DPW, Planning Board	Medium	Ongoing	Staff capacity

Community Facilities & Services

Goal: Provide high-quality and transparent governance, maintain adequate public utilities, and build local community by offering cultural programming and events.

#	Action	Relevant Master Plan Elements	Responsibility	Priority (High, Medium, Low, Ongoing)	Timeframe (1-3, 4-6, 7-10 years, or ongoing)	Resources Needed
CF1	Undertake a study to identify additional drinking water sources and water storage options which could include looking regionally.	Natural Resources	DPW, Select Board	Medium; ongoing	Ongoing	Project funding
CF2	Explore potential regionalization opportunities- sharing of staff time and other resources with other smaller communities in the region.		Select Board, Finance Dept.	Ongoing	Ongoing	Funding, staff capacity for coordination
CF3	Evaluate and incorporate climate risks into Capital Improvement Plans and financial considerations for publicly funded projects and infrastructure maintenance through incorporating green energy and efficient design.	Natural Resources	Capital Planning Committee	Ongoing	Ongoing	
CF4	Create a standalone Town Manager/Administer position by amending the Town Charter.		Select Board, Town Meeting	High	4-6 yrs	Additional annual funding
CF5	Determine suitable locations for and build a new Department of Public Works facility.		DPW, Select Board, Town Meeting	Medium	4-6 yrs	Support for Debt Exclusion

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Appendices

Appendix A:

Summary of November 15, 2023 Community Meeting

Merrimac Master Plan 2023

Community Meeting #1

November 15, 2023,

Phase 1 of Merrimac's Master Plan process allowed residents to join an in-person community meeting on November 15, 2023, located in Merrimac's Town Hall. There were 50 members of the public in attendance, not counting the Town staff and Steering Committee consultants from Barrett Planning Group. The consulting team and Master Plan Steering Committee designed and ran the meeting, guiding activities, and the large group discussion. This first meeting was an introductory session to the Master Plan process, describing what this plan entails and what still needs to be done since the Master Plan 2002.

The meeting started with a presentation of what the plan entails, how long the process will be, and an overview of what was covered in the previous Master Plan. After Barrett Planning Group finished their presentation, a group discussion began with all the attendees which was a SWOT analysis of Merrimac's present and future needs. After an hour-long discussion that highlighted the SWOT themes residents commented on, a mapping exercise with smaller groups was established.

For the SWOT analysis, Barrett Planning Group created a Miro Board which includes the four categories of strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities. Each comment we received from the public was put onto the board under the category it corresponds to. The comments included what they enjoy, dislike, envision, or recommend changing in Merrimac, which all fit into at least one of the four categories. Participants had the most to say when it came to economic development and Merrimack River accessibility. The live notes taken during the SWOT are attached to this memo.

For the map exercise, there were four tables each displaying a printed-out map. Each table had a moderator from the Steering Committee or Town Staff to guide participants improve, preserve, or transform when it comes to the physical aspects around Merrimac. Attachment B includes the maps with color-coded stickers highlighting the areas around the Town the attendees chose for different categories of the exercise.

Key Takeaways

Strengths

- Town Staff is very transparent when it comes to governance, a small rural town like Merrimac has more opportunities for local government interactions.
- The number of beaches in and around the Town and accessibility to Lake Attitash

- Merrimac has a long history, and the residents value the landscape and Victorian architecture the area has had for more than a century.
- The abundance of open space and agricultural land adds to the rural town aesthetic Merrimac has.

Weaknesses

- Sewer and water capacity- limits development potential. There has been a cap on the amount of water the Town can use for decades due to State regulations. Due to Merrimac being a smaller town, they lack the political clout to dissuade this restriction, even though they have been trying for years.
- Not enough commercial tax revenue to offset residential taxes. 96% of revenue is from residents, which is due to a need for more businesses and industry. Merrimac is not a Town that has competition between businesses.
- The Town Staff has been increasing in vacancies due to an increase in retirements, so it has been difficult to fill the open positions.
- In a general sense, Merrimac did not follow the guidelines from Merrimac's previous Master Plan, leaving a lot of goals not completed and visions unrealized.

Opportunities

- Making Merrimac attractive and viable for younger families to move there. This relates to providing a wider range of different housing options- focusing on existing housing, not just new construction.
- Convert the Town dump into a solar farm for more green energy and infrastructure.
- Create opportunities to harness local agriculture for food supply while also keeping in mind the restrictions, they need to be registered farms with a minimum 5 or 3-acre size.
- Better analyze and understand trends of residents moving to and from Merrimac to better cater to the needs of current and potential future residents.
- There are vacant lots with development potential that could be the site of future economic or cultural projects.

Threats

- With the threat of climate change, there is an increased risk of flooding and more hazardous storms that can cause lasting damage to Merrimac's infrastructure.
- Population growing beyond infrastructure capacity, so creating new developments for housing wherever possible would be beneficial. The population is also getting older, as younger families are leaving the area.
- One attendee commented that Merrimac is considered an isolated "pass-through" town in between Haverhill and Amesbury with no self-identity.
- Several large farms might not be able to continue as they are, which Merrimac should plan for soon.

Map Exercise Results

Each small group shared their top locations for each of the three categories. The important locations discussed in the report-out were:

Preserve

- Lake Attitash
- Town Forest- needs formal, permanent conservation
- McLaren Trail

Improve

- Extending walking trails
- Improve amenities/access to Merrimack River
- Improve downtown, get more commercial/restaurants, extend downtown along Route 110
- Quality of Lake Attitash- greater opportunities for beach access
- Playgrounds and elementary schools
- Town buildings/senior center
- Town walkability- currently poor sidewalk connectivity and condition

Transform

- Transform Lynn Sign Factory building into a brewery or other business
- Skip's could also be a brewery site
- Emery St. Field
- North St. – more houses on smaller lots
- Brook behind the fire station

The general assets Merrimac has according to a majority of meeting participants agreed on include:

- Increase in economic development
- Town's Natural beauty and important history
- Good and understanding Town Staff

The current general issues that Merrimac needs to address according to participants include:

- Most participants believed Merrimac needs to be more conscientious of the needs of different age groups and demographics to accommodate residents' needs
- Septic and water system restriction issues for future economic and housing development
- More permanent protection of open space, especially the Town Forest
- Get businesses to open in Merrimac so residents take less of a tax burden

Attachment A: SWOT Notes

Merrimac Master Plan Community Meeting November 15, 2023

SWOT Analysis

Attachment B: Map Activity

Merrimac Town Map
Community Meeting #1

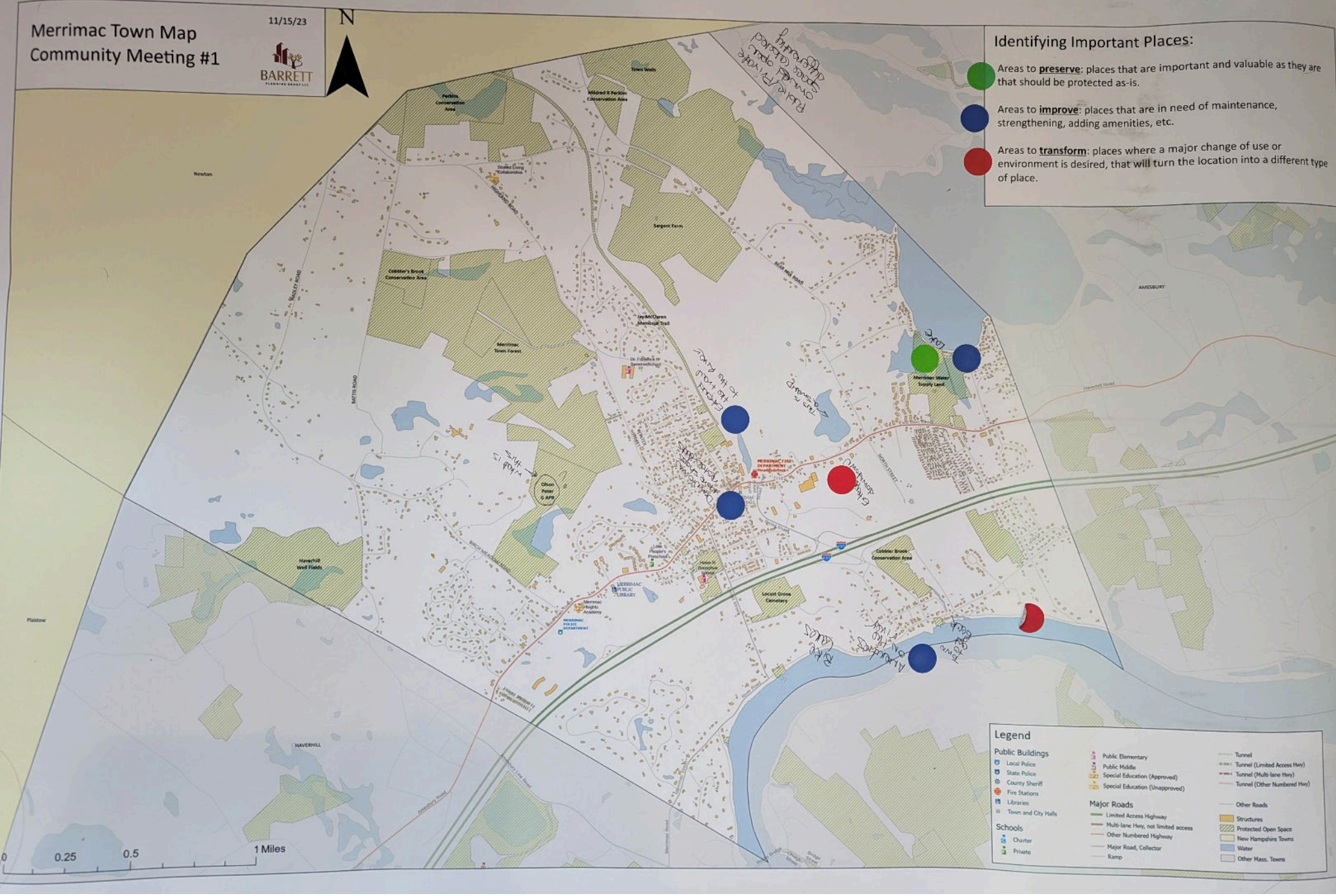
11/15/23

BARRETT PLANNING GROUP LLC

N

Identifying Important Places:

- Areas to **preserve**: places that are important and valuable as they are that should be protected as-is.
- Areas to **improve**: places that are in need of maintenance, strengthening, adding amenities, etc.
- Areas to **transform**: places where a major change of use or environment is desired, that will turn the location into a different type of place.



Legend

Public Buildings
- Local Police
- State Police
- County Sheriff
- Fire Stations
- Libraries
- Town and City Halls

Schools
- Charter
- Private
- Public Elementary
- Public Middle
- Special Education (Approved)
- Special Education (Unapproved)

Major Roads
- Limited Access Highway
- Multi-lane Hwy, not limited access
- Other Numbered Highway
- Major Road, Collector
- Ramp
- Tunnel
- Tunnel (Limited Access Hwy)
- Tunnel (Multi-lane Hwy)
- Tunnel (Other Numbered Hwy)
- Other Roads

- Structures
- Protected Open Space
- New Hampshire Towns
- Water
- Other Mass. Towns

Merrimac Town Map
Community Meeting #1

11/15/23

BARRETT PLANNING GROUP LLC

N

Identifying Important Places:

Areas to **preserve**: places that are important and valuable as they are that should be protected as-is.

Areas to **improve**: places that are in need of maintenance, strengthening, adding amenities, etc.

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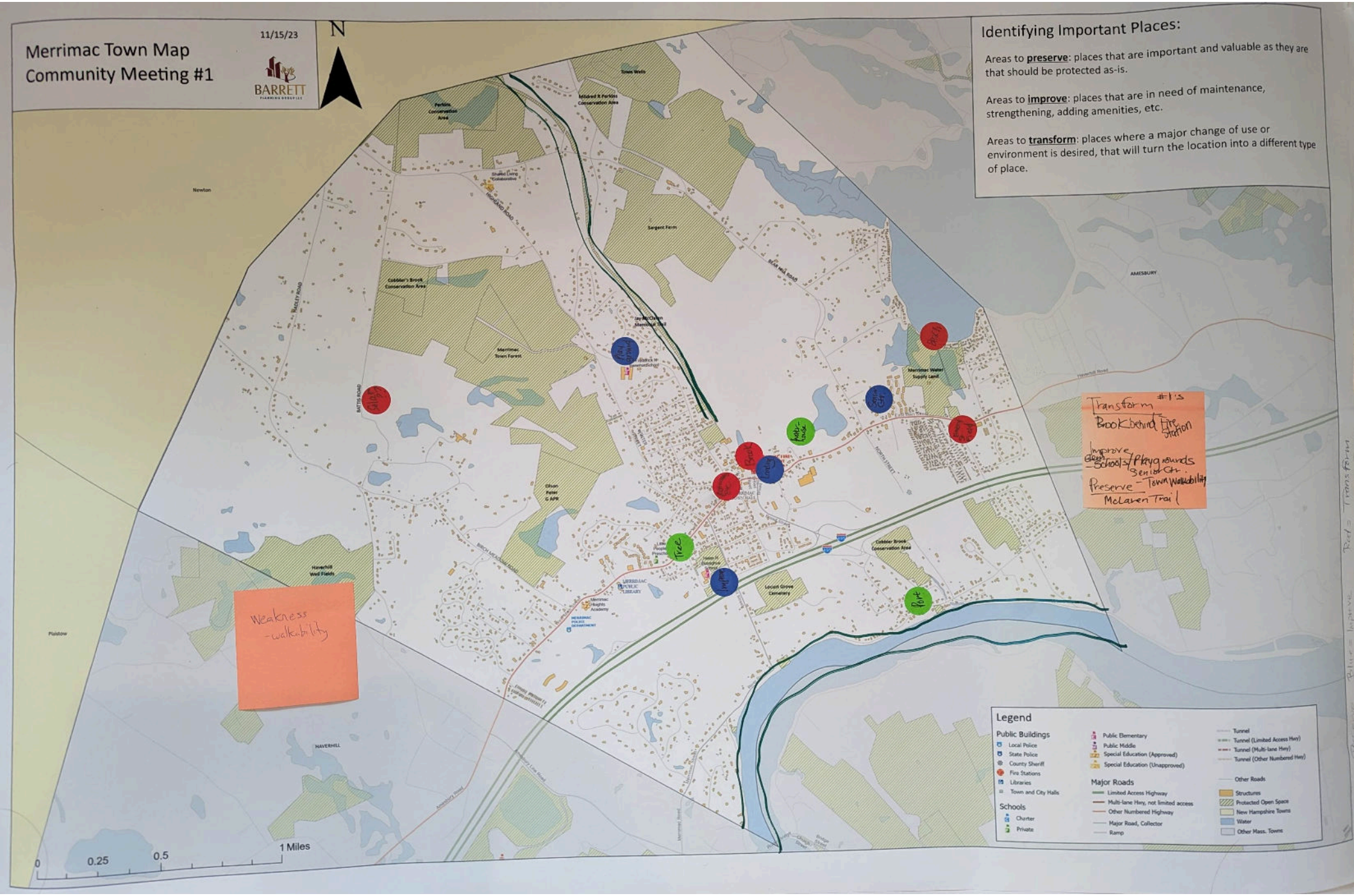

Red = Transform

Blue = Improve

Merrimac Town Map
Community Meeting #1

11/15/23

BARRETT PLANNING GROUP LLC

N

Identifying Important Places:

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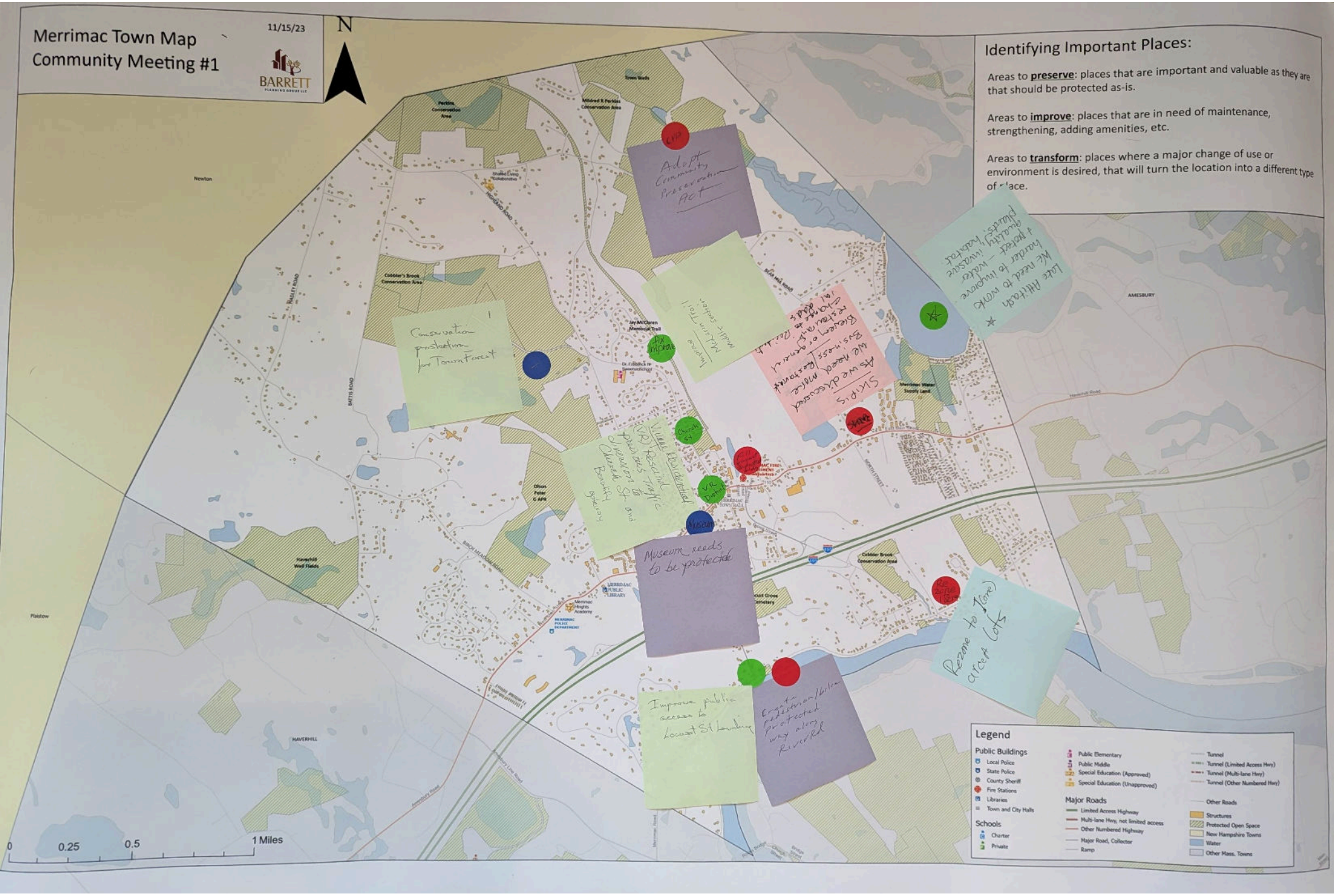

Legend

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- Other Roads
- Structures
- Protected Open Space
- New Hampshire Towns
- Water
- Other Mass. Towns

Merrimac Town Map
Community Meeting #1

11/15/23

BARRETT PLANNING GROUP LLC

N

Identifying Important Places:

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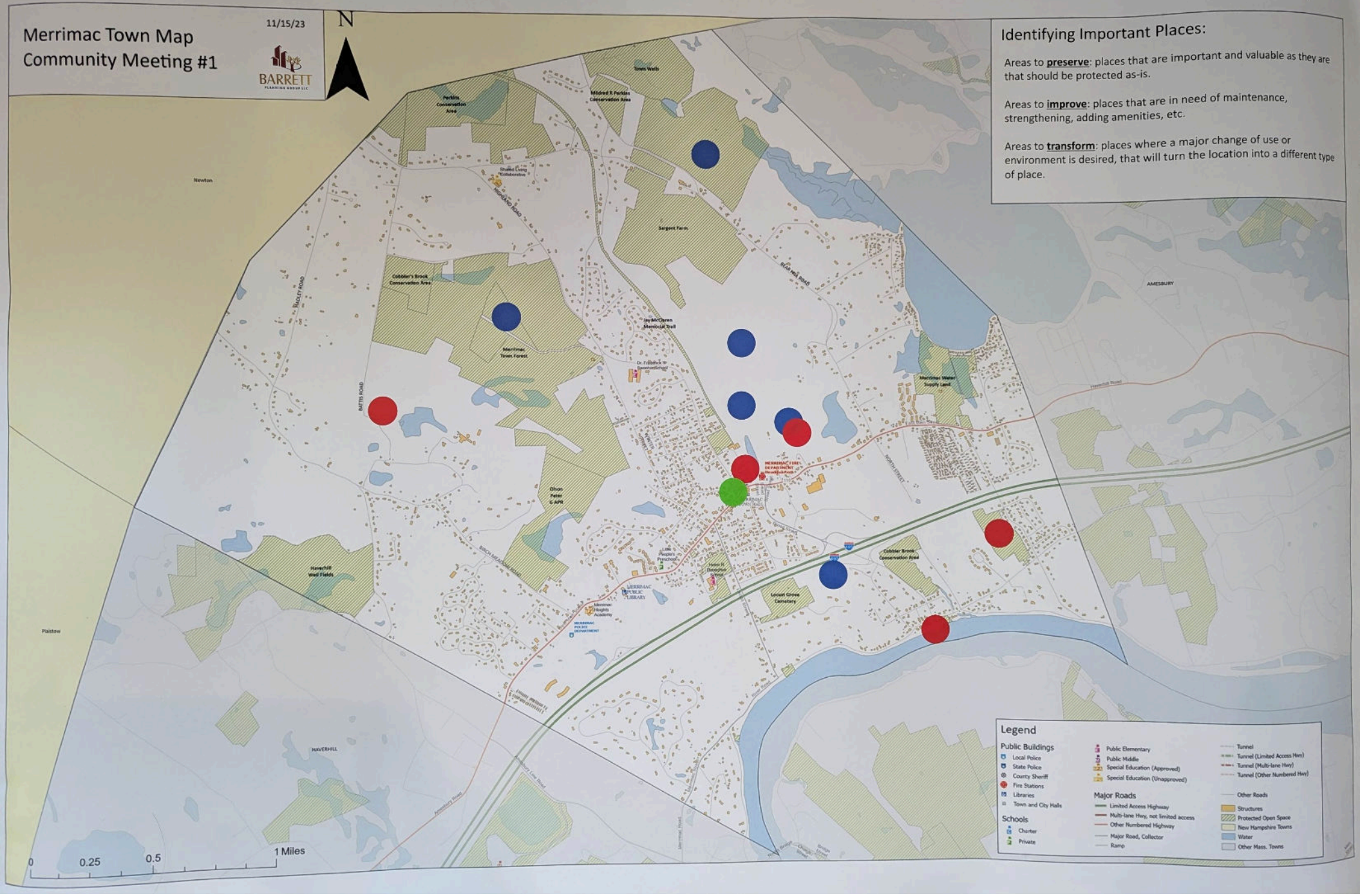

Appendix B:

Summary of May 15, 2024 Community Meeting

Merrimac Master Plan 2023-2024

Community Meeting #2

May 15, 2024

The Master Plan Steering Committee invited the community to a second in-person public meeting in Merrimac's Town Hall. There were about 30 members of the public in attendance. The Steering Committee and consultants from Barrett Planning Group designed and ran the meeting and facilitated small group discussions. The meeting began with a presentation summarizing the process to date, including findings from the Inventory and Assessment chapter and results from the town-wide community survey.

After Barrett Planning Group finished their presentation, participants were sorted into several small groups to conduct guided discussions designed to generate feedback for the Master Plan's goals. Participants were given posters with the goals from the previous 2002 Master Plan sorted by topic area. A volunteer from each group read each goal out, and each group discussed whether the previous goals were still relevant to the 2024 Master Plan, and how those that were no longer relevant could be updated.

A list of the 2002 goals the groups were asked to consider are included here as Attachment A, as well as summary of the live notes taken during the small-group activity. Participants generally felt that the priorities expressed in the previous plan were still relevant, but had many ideas on how to refine and bolster the old goals to make them more relevant and actionable.

To encourage as many residents to take part in the exercise as possible, the Town posted a link on its website that allowed participants to submit responses to the same prompts given in-person at the May 15, 2024 meeting.

Attachment A: Small Group Discussion Notes

Merrimac Community Meeting, May 15, 2024 - Summary of Notes

Previous Master Plan Goals	Group 1 Notes	Group 2 Notes	Group 3 Notes	Group 4 Notes	
Land Use					
Reinforce Merrimac's rural-village land use pattern by conforming future development to the historic arrangement of buildings and streets.	NR		keep	yes to mixed use, but no to rural highway- commercial dev. Missing	ALL STILL RELEVANT
Develop an orderly arrangement of residential, non-residential and public land uses along and adjacent to the Route 110 corridor.	NR		keep/amend	some residential 55+, still need more commercial	
Use land efficiently and in an environmentally responsible manner when developing new neighborhoods and business areas.	NR - missing consideration of utilities; need exemptions from zoning rules to make happen	senior housing in watershed protection areas?	keep/be more specific	Not done- unused space, electrification missing	
Housing					
Provide housing choice throughout the community.	need housing choices	increased senior housing	"choice" change to "diversity"	Have added 55+ and mixed use	need more public housing; still need more affordable housing under Ch.40B
Protect and enhance the historic, intimate character of existing neighborhoods.	NR	attractive- well done	way(?) rejected from national inventory	Village district has addressed this- could do more w historic	
Use regulations effectively to promote neighborhood-scale design in new residential developments.	NR- preserve housing stock	achieved	inclusionary zoning/rezoning	still relevant	
Transportation					
Encourage pedestrian and bicycle access to all parts of town by providing a safe, scenic, interconnected system of roads, sidewalks and trails.	There have been bike paths, some new sidewalks	No bike lanes, sidewalk stops		include bus?	All still relevant!
Assure vehicular and pedestrian safety along Route 110 and within Merrimac Square, using development controls, public transportation, parking, traffic calming techniques, and corridor improvements to achieve these ends.		Added rotary- safer & slower traffic		square renovations have helped; need bike lane/share the road	
Improve and enhance the town's gateways.		poor welcome to Merrimac		5 cross boxes- progress, but still more to do	
Natural & Cultural Resources					
Treat Merrimac's natural resources, historic architecture and landmarks as irreplaceable public assets.					
Assure that new development respects the topography and character of the land.					
Retain and enhance Merrimac Square as the town's social, economic, civic and governmental center.				lots of holes remain; parking, other major issues remain	
Support and promote cultural activities for the education, entertainment and general benefit of Merrimac residents.		Merrimac too small to support cultural center			
Open Space & Recreation					
Preserve and connect large tracts of open space.				all still relevant goals	
Assure the continuity of agriculture as a vital open space feature in Merrimac.					
Provide accessible parks and recreation facilities that foster a sense of community, serve residents of all ages and increase public awareness of Merrimac's open space resources.				more parks/rec/flooding issues	
Community Facilities & Services					
Manage and maintain conveniently located public facilities that meet the needs of Merrimac residents and town employees.	Y	added pickleball court Donahue school; want boat launch in river, place for kids & teens, more senior trips; public park	keep; include bike paths, walking, etc.	work in progress; need to maintain senior center	
Provide high quality municipal and school services at a price residents can afford.	N	Chapter 70; concerns about school taxes			
Develop, manage and maintain public utilities and infrastructure to achieve the town's land use goals in a fiscally sound manner.	N	municipal power co- big advantage; water restrictions, not enough water to accomplish goal		light dept.	
Economic Development					
Create commercial and mixed-use districts that encourage small businesses to thrive in Merrimac.	need to create incentives/zoning to make these happen				
Promote and nurture new small business enterprise.		lost drug store, skips, café; clothing stores to appeal to young ppl		restaurants, businesses, retail	
Develop and strengthen Merrimac's employment base to provide regionally competitive wages.					
Retain agriculture as a vital element of the local economy.				lucky 7, small farms (no large ones left)	

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Appendix C:
Summary of 2024 Community Survey

Merrimac Community Survey Summary

Introduction

The Town of Merrimac offered residents the chance to participate in a public survey distributed through the Town's website and social media outlets, in addition to paper copies available at the Merrimac Public Library. The survey was filled out by 490 Merrimac residents. This memo summarizes the contents of the survey and reports the results.

The survey was split into two parts. One allowing respondents to provide feedback on findings from the first Master Plan public meeting held in Town Hall on November 15, 2023, and add their own responses to the same questions asked at that meeting.

The other part posed some general questions related to the seven Master Plan elements:

- Land Use
- Transportation
- Natural & Cultural Resources
- Open Space and Recreation
- Housing
- Economic Development
- Public Facilities and Services

Major Themes

- **Long-Term Residency and Historic Affordability** - Most respondents are long-term residents and home-owners who moved to Merrimac for its then-affordable living and convenient location within the region.

- **Demand for more Recreational Amenities and Access** - Respondents tended to use recreational facilities in neighboring communities more frequently than in Merrimac itself. That being said, a number of respondents wished for more and better recreational facilities within Merrimac, including more playgrounds, enhancing existing trails, providing access to the Merrimac River, and creating a beach area near Lake Attitash.

- **Road Safety and Walkability** - Poor road conditions and speeding were lifted up by comments as being areas for improvement in the city, as well as to a lesser extent the number and condition of sidewalks. Better bus stops could support public transit use, while walkability and bikeability within the town could be improved through enforcement of sidewalk snow clearing, slower speed limits, and bike infrastructure.

- **Lack of Consensus on Housing Development** - While there was a desire for more affordable housing in Merrimac, there was not a clear agreement on the type of housing desired. There was some preference for single-family housing, and interest in starter homes and adaptive reuse of empty buildings or lots in town for housing.

- **Concern for New Development** - A sizable number of respondents were generally opposed to any new development in Merrimac, with a particular focus on housing

development. For these respondents, Merrimac has experienced fast population growth and was now at capacity in its services like sewage. New development was thought to threaten the quiet, New England small-town character of Merrimac.

- **Building Merrimac's Commercial Viability** - Many of the respondents observed how residents leave Merrimac for business and recreation. They wish to promote Merrimac as a destination for visitors who otherwise pass-through, and develop a good business environment to build the town's tax base and revenue. . Developing short-term rentals or bed and breakfasts, encouraging artists to reside in town through new studio spaces, or improving Merrimac's agricultural sector, were mentioned as ways to reenergize the town's economy.

- **Specific Commercial Needs for Merrimac** - Retail, entertainment, art space, and specific businesses like gas stations, groceries, and pharmacies were commonly brought up as areas the town could enhance its local economy. Restaurants in particular were most popularly seen as necessary for the town, to serve as both attractions for visitors and gathering spaces to support the town economy.

- **Taxation and Town Management** - Some respondents found Merrimac's taxes too high or disagreed with how the town used its funds, engaged the community, and enforced policies in land use, traffic, and public services.

- **Mixed Views on Merrimac's older population** - Two groups emerged within the comments related to Merrimac's older population: one interested in expanding affordable senior living in town, and the other concerned there was too much 55+ housing development and the political influence of the older adult population in Merrimac.

- **Important Sites for Development and Improvement** - Lake Attitash, the Merrimac River, and the Emery St. Field were commonly noted for their recreational value, while Merri-village, the building near Cozy Cleaners, and buildings near Downtown were seen as having potential for new housing development.

Summary by Question

<u>Question 1</u>

- A substantial majority (96%) of respondents live in Merrimac year-round.
- Comments suggested a number of respondents both live in Merrimac and own a business in town.

<u>Question 2</u>

- The primary drivers for people who decided to settle in Merrimac included finding housing that met their needs (69%), followed by its small-town community and safety (44%), and its convenient location within the region (28%). Few had existing connections to Merrimac (i.e. past residency, family links, or employment, 33% cumulative of those categories).
- Comments indicated that some of the respondents - while not having grown up in Merrimac itself - looked for housing near their home communities. Other motivations

included Merrimac's historic affordability, or a spousal connection that motivated their move.

Question 3

- More than 91% of respondents were home-owners, with 5% of respondents being renters.
- Comments to this question suggested that residents lived in a variety of housing types - from a mobile home park, to a condo or apartment. A few respondents mentioned having lived or currently living in their parent's home.

Question 4

- The respondents to this survey represent a variety of residency years within Merrimac. More than half of respondents (52%) have lived in Merrimac for more than 15 years, while only 4% of respondents have lived under a year in the town.

Question 5

- The respondents to this survey also represent a variety of ages within Merrimac, yet skew towards an older demographic. Less than 1% were under 18-years (and 2% under 24), while 72% were between 18-64-years, and 26% above 65-years.

Question 6

- While 49% of respondents believed there were adequate recreational facilities, parks, or open space near their home or place of employment, 39% did not and 11% were unsure, indicating a lack of consensus.

Question 7 and 8

- 40% of respondents do not often use Merrimac's recreational facilities, parks, or open space, while 28% use them a few times a month and 18% on a weekly basis.
- That being said, respondents said they use other neighboring town's facilities more frequently compared to Merrimac, with 20% using it weekly, 41% monthly, and only 28% not often.

Question 9 + 10

- A majority of respondents (54%) are dissatisfied with the road conditions in Merrimac. 38% are satisfied with road conditions, and only 4% are very satisfied.
- Looking at sidewalk conditions, only 33% are dissatisfied while 24% are satisfied and 9% very satisfied. While people appear to have greater satisfaction on bike infrastructure in Merrimac, there is also a much greater uncertainty in how people feel about it (34%).

Question 11 + 12

- A majority of respondents (52%) are dissatisfied with the sidewalk conditions in Merrimac, while 34% were satisfied and 3% very satisfied.
- A majority of respondents (50%) were similarly dissatisfied with the number of sidewalks in Merrimac, with only 32% satisfied and 4% very satisfied.

Question 13

- When asked what transportation infrastructure could be expanded in Merrimac, a majority of respondents (55%) were interested in walking, followed by biking (32%), rideshare services (30%), bus service (16%). Carpooling received the least interest (3%), while 29% were unsure.
- Comments suggested specific interventions to improve transportation including more sidewalks and policies for snow clearing on sidewalks in the winter. An additional bus, and covered bus stops with benches were also mentioned. Other relevant responses included a focus on slower streets, and interest in EV infrastructure, bike rentals, and interest in recreating the rail trail found in Amesbury/Salisbury/Newburyport.

Question 14

- When asked what type of housing Merrimac needs, the most popular response (46%) was that Merrimac did not need more housing. This was followed by a sizable number of respondents (41%) who indicated Merrimac needed more single- or two-family housing. ADUs (8%), townhomes (10%), and artist residents/studio units (11%) were least popular, while 8% were unsure.
- Looking at the comments reveal stronger opinions about what type of housing, if any, should be built in Merrimac. The most frequent observations related to the lack of affordable housing in Merrimac.
- Two sets of comments shared differing views on senior housing: 1) that there is too much 55+ housing development in Merrimac, and 2) that there is difficulty finding *affordable* senior housing in the town.
- A contingent of respondents were generally against new developments, either citing too much recent population growth and too little capacity for new residents, or developments changing the look, character, and land value of the town.
- A number of respondents shared the perspective of renovating or reusing existing buildings and homes to increase housing, with a particular focus on the Merri-village site.
- Other comments spoke of needing more single-family housing and/or starter homes to cater to families.

Question 15

- When asked what type of business Merrimac needs, 86% indicated Merrimac needed more food service establishments, followed by 59% who said Merrimac needed retail,

and 40% who said arts and entertainment. Only 4% said Merrimac did not need more business.

- Gas stations were cited 11 times in the comments as being needed in the town of Merrimac. EV chargers were also mentioned by two respondents.
- Restaurants were another very common request by respondents, which some respondents saw as contributing to the goal below or provide a gathering space.
- Some comments responded to a need for Merrimac to attract visitors to its downtown and to support the local economy. Respondents were open to any business to that end and some professed a preference for small/local businesses. A few comments relating to short-term rentals and B&Bs could also be interpreted as a desire to support this goal as well.
- Recreational and sports facilities were another feature in the comments, which also included a request to reopen the lake for swimming.
- A pharmacy was the third most popular specific business type listed in the comments.
- Only two comments desired no additional growth in Merrimac to protect its look and character.

Question 16

- 72% of survey respondents saw conserving land and natural resources as an important land use priority for Merrimac, followed by developing more commercial or mixed-use (39%), preserving historic properties (39%), and improving infrastructure capacity (36%). Less popular objectives included improving transportation and connectivity (19%) and developing housing (11%).
- A need for recreation spaces - including sports facilities, playgrounds near schools or the Emery St site, or swimming at Lake Attitash - were the most common comment for land use objectives.
- This was followed by a desire to improve walkability/bikeability in the town and to generally improve the street experience and infrastructure.
- Some respondents were interested in utilizing land use to attract business, increase revenue, and support the local economy.
- There was some interest in having minimal or no development in Merrimac. This included wanting to beautify or maintain the small-town aesthetic of the town, promote single-family housing, or converting tracts entering the market as common space. A few wanted to ensure land use zoning was being properly applied.
- A mix of other housing types were proposed, including net-zero housing, mixed-use land development, and affordable housing for young families.

Question 17

- A majority of respondents saw Entrepreneur or small business development (65%) and tax base expansion (51%) as economic development priorities, while work-from-home opportunities (16%) had the least interest.

- There were a mix of concerns in the comments regarding economic development objectives. Some respondents noted the difficulties of high taxes in Merrimac, while a few comments had a common theme of focusing on what already exists within the town.

Question 18

- 68% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Merrimac's New England architecture and landscape, and 68% respondents saw its small, tight-knit community are strengths of the town. Merrimac's Transparent and participatory Town government was found to be the characteristic with the least agreement as a strength.
- Natural features like the Merrimac River and Lake Attitash were seen as important strengths to the town of Merrimac in the comments. Its location - as having easy access to I-495 and I-95, New Hampshire, the coast, and other destinations like Boston and Maine were similarly popular strengths listed. Schools were another strength listed, and a few cited Merrimac's quiet, small-town feel.

Question 19

- 87% of respondents found the lack of businesses and commercial tax revenue as a weakness of Merrimac, followed by 73% of respondents who found the poor condition of roads and sidewalks a weakness, and 59% an aging population.
- The Merrimac River and Lake Attitash, while considered strengths of Merrimac, also were listed as weaknesses given their inaccessibility.
- Other weaknesses listed by respondents included road condition, traffic and safety, and inadequate walkability of the town particularly looking at sidewalks.
- Some respondents saw Merrimac's recent population growth, development, and specifically new housing as weaknesses of the town, while a smaller number pointed to the underutilized and empty buildings that existed around town. There was also a critique of town government's management, whether it be in the understaffed city services, facilities for meetings, zoning enforcement, and underfunded school budget.
- More specific weaknesses listed include the lack of a grocery story, pharmacy, restaurants (as gathering spaces), and parks or recreation. Flooding was also brought up as an issue within the town.

Question 20

- The most popular opportunities listed for Merrimac among respondents included Attract businesses that will give people passing through Merrimac a reason to stop (86% agreed or strongly agreed), Create opportunities to harness local agriculture for food supply (80%), and Making Merrimac attractive and viable for younger families to move there (76%). Providing a wider range of housing options for residents (50%) was least popular and had the most disagreement.
- Opportunities listed in the comments included themes of reducing or stopping development, in some cases to preserve the small town character of Merrimac.

Developing new or enhanced recreation, parks, and open spaces - particularly with accessing the Lake and River - were also seen as important opportunities.
- Ways of increasing revenue and high-paying jobs through encouraging food, retail, and other amenities were also mentioned.
- Another opportunity included developing spaces for artists and the reuse of manufacturing buildings to suit affordable housing or artist studios.

Question 21

- Managing growth and new development- figure out how to provide services and plan thoughtfully for new development was seen as a threat for 77% of respondents. Increased risk of flooding and more hazardous storms that can cause lasting damage had the least agreement among respondents as a threat to Merrimac.
- Water management was seen as a key threat to Merrimac due to flooding and access to sewers. A need for road safety, new changes in the town's agricultural sector, and rising taxes were also highlighted. Respondents also noted the town needed to promote itself more to build its tax base.
- The composition of the town as catering to older adults was also seen as a threat to Merrimac's prosperity.

Question 22

- Over 75% of respondents saw Lake Attitash's clean water and recreational opportunities, Town Forest's beauty and trails, McLaren Trail for multiple recreational purposes as worth preserving, with the Town's Forest being the most popular.
- Most comments relating to valuable features of Merrimac focused on Lake Attitash and the Merrimac River and access to these recreational areas. A small number highlighted a number of parks around town including Carraige Park, Carey Park, and the Emery St. Soccer Fields.

Question 23

- Respondents saw strengthening walking trails/connectivity and downtown as priorities for improvement, while the Town buildings & Senior Center were least popular as a priority for improvement.
- The comments reflected this interest in improving the downtown buildings and area, but also showed mixed interest in improving the senior center. Other areas of interest included Lake Attitash, recreational spaces, roads and sidewalk improvements.

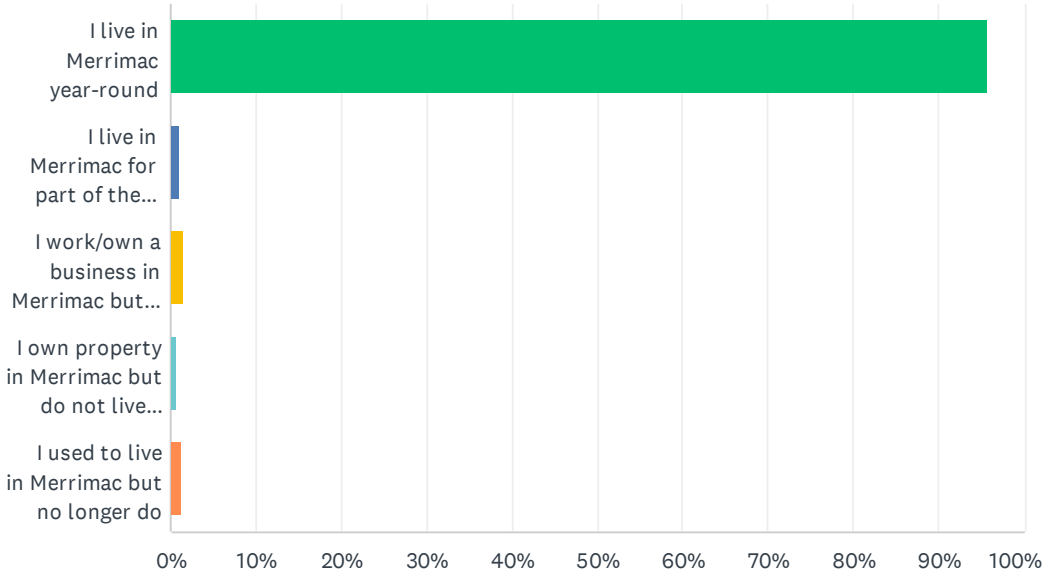
Question 24

- 70% of respondents saw the incorporation of vacant or underutilized properties into Downtown Merrimac as an important place to transform.

- Sites of transformation that were raised in the comments included the Emery St field, which individuals wanted to leave as is or return to nature, the building by Cozy Cleaners, River Road, and downtown.

Q1 What best describes your relationship with Merrimac?

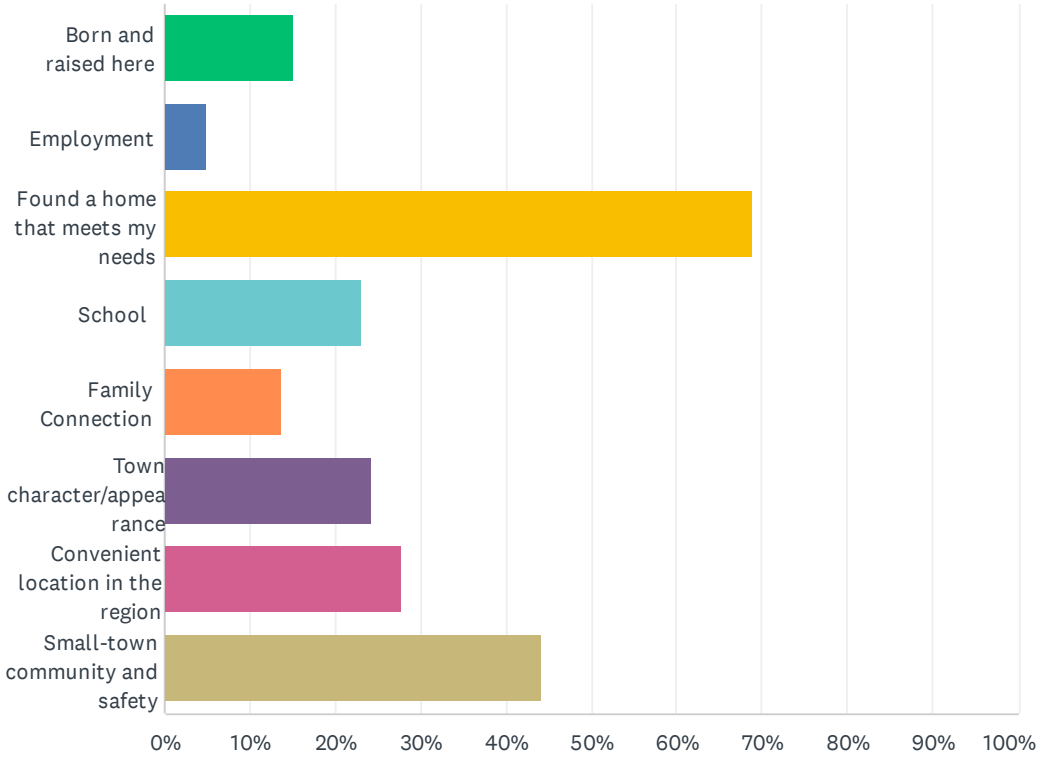
Answered: 490 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
I live in Merrimac year-round	95.71%	469
I live in Merrimac for part of the year	1.02%	5
I work/own a business in Merrimac but do not live there	1.43%	7
I own property in Merrimac but do not live here	0.61%	3
I used to live in Merrimac but no longer do	1.22%	6
TOTAL		490

Q2 What brought you to Merrimac? Select all that apply.

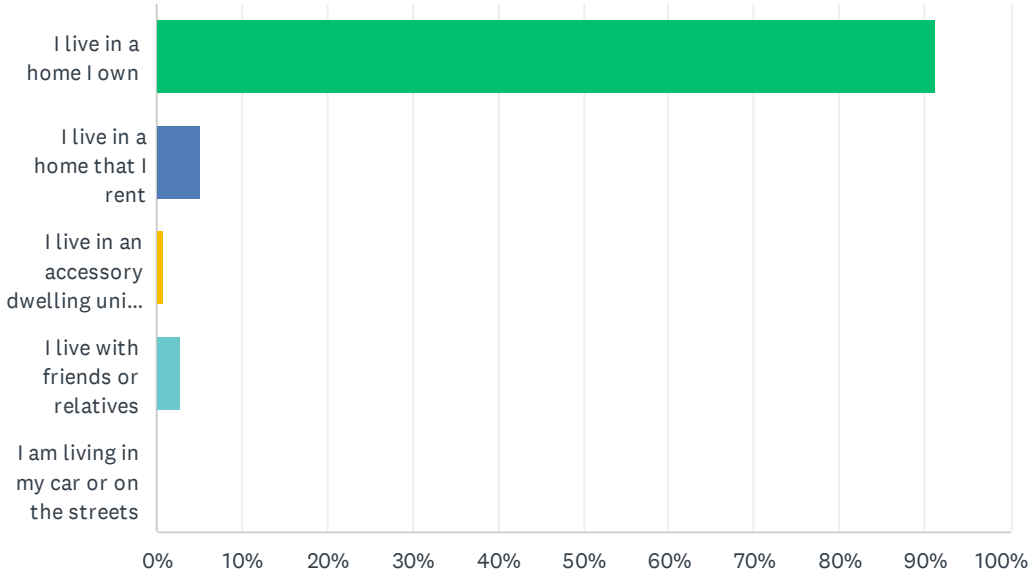
Answered: 456 Skipped: 34



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Born and raised here	15.13%	69
Employment	4.82%	22
Found a home that meets my needs	68.86%	314
School	23.03%	105
Family Connection	13.60%	62
Town character/appearance	24.34%	111
Convenient location in the region	27.63%	126
Small-town community and safety	44.08%	201
Total Respondents: 456		

Q3 What best describes your current living arrangement?

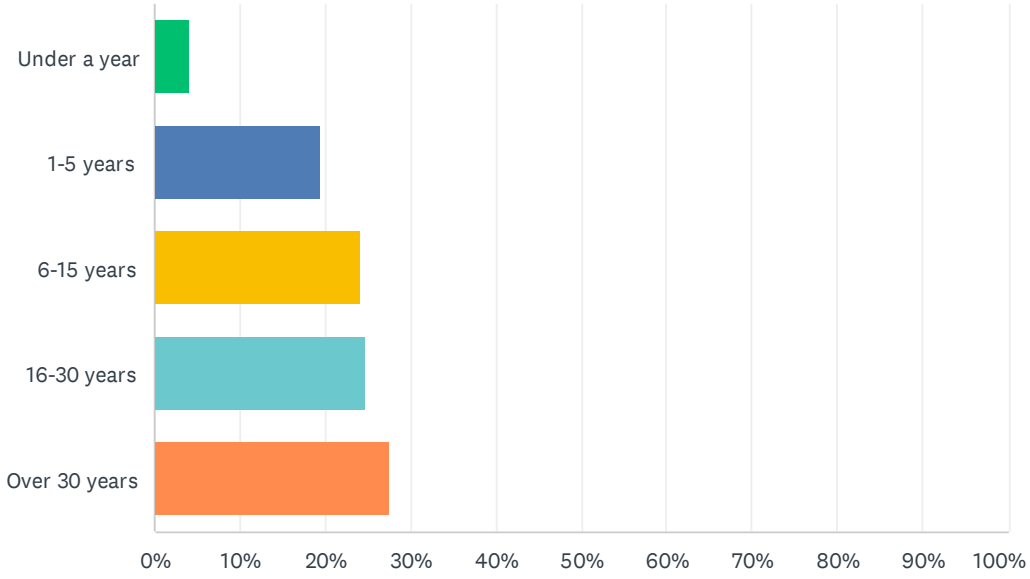
Answered: 458 Skipped: 32



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
I live in a home I own	91.27%	418
I live in a home that I rent	5.02%	23
I live in an accessory dwelling unit (ADU)	0.87%	4
I live with friends or relatives	2.84%	13
I am living in my car or on the streets	0.00%	0
TOTAL		458

Q4 How long have you lived in Merrimac?

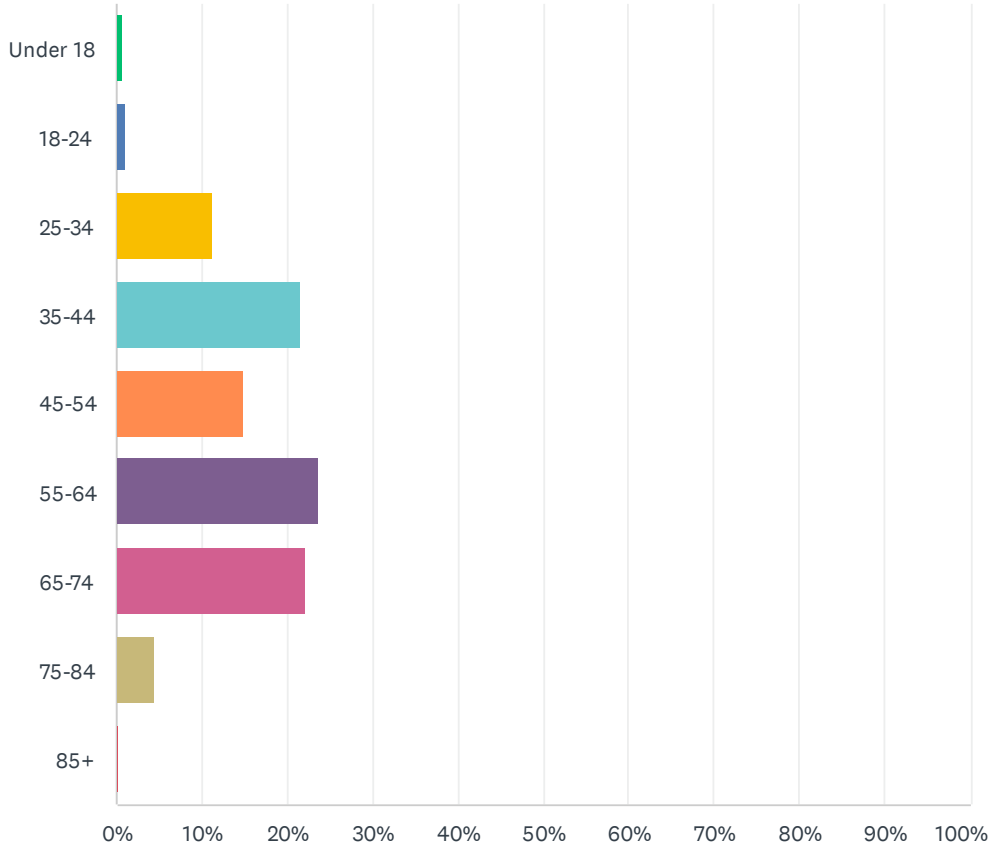
Answered: 463 Skipped: 27



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under a year	4.10%	19
1-5 years	19.44%	90
6-15 years	24.19%	112
16-30 years	24.84%	115
Over 30 years	27.43%	127
TOTAL		463

Q5 What is your age?

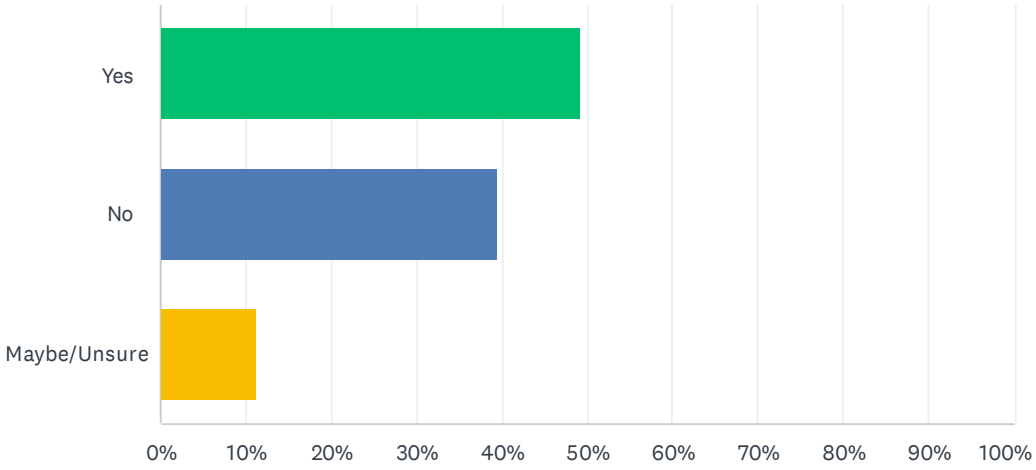
Answered: 483 Skipped: 7



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 18	0.62%	3
18-24	1.04%	5
25-34	11.39%	55
35-44	21.53%	104
45-54	14.91%	72
55-64	23.60%	114
65-74	22.15%	107
75-84	4.55%	22
85+	0.21%	1
TOTAL		483

Q6 Are there adequate recreational facilities, parks, or open spaces near your home or place of employment?

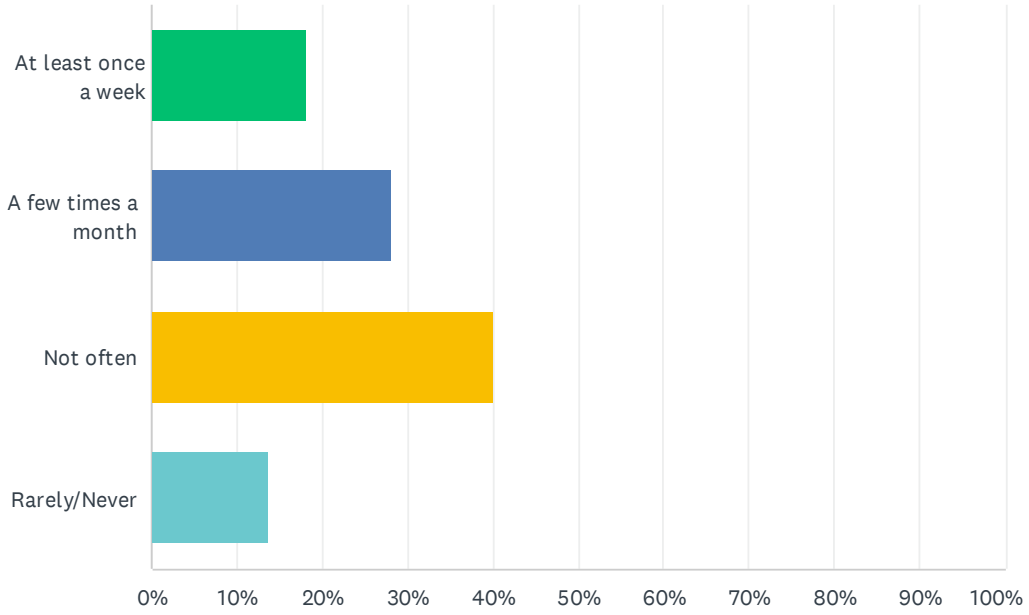
Answered: 452 Skipped: 38



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	49.34%	223
No	39.38%	178
Maybe/Unsure	11.28%	51
TOTAL		452

Q7 How often do you visit Merrimac's recreational facilities, parks, or open spaces?

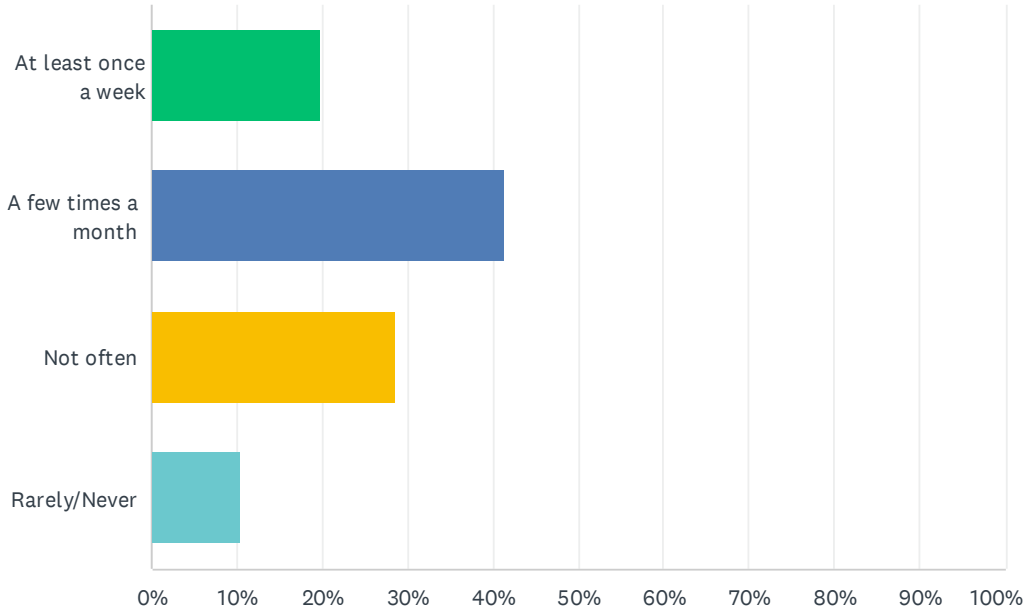
Answered: 452 Skipped: 38



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
At least once a week	18.14%	82
A few times a month	28.10%	127
Not often	40.04%	181
Rarely/Never	13.72%	62
TOTAL		452

Q8 Do you visit recreational facilities, parks, or open spaces in other nearby towns?

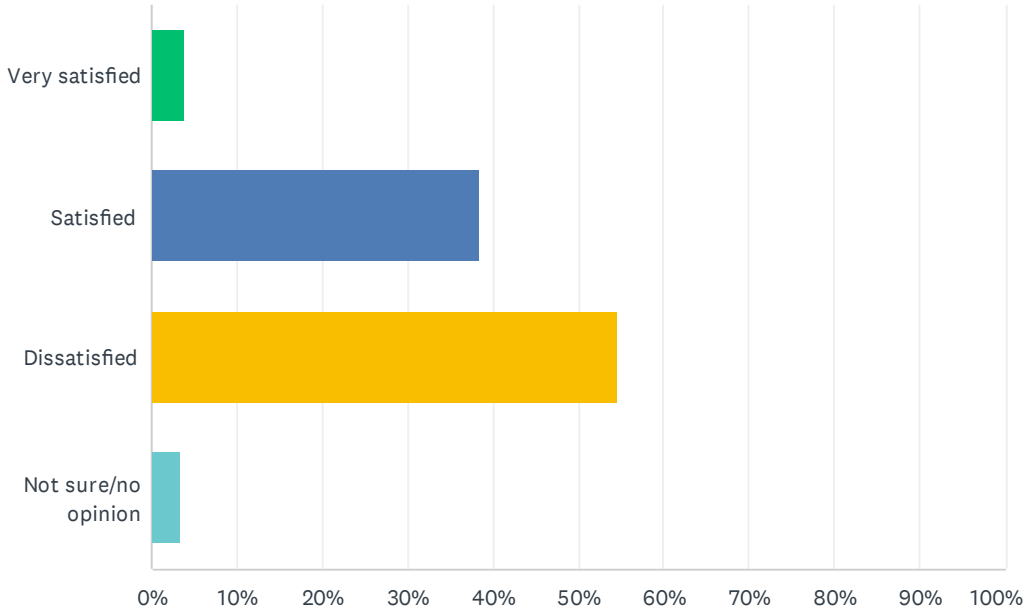
Answered: 453 Skipped: 37



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
At least once a week	19.87%	90
A few times a month	41.28%	187
Not often	28.48%	129
Rarely/Never	10.38%	47
TOTAL		453

Q9 How satisfied are you with the quality and conditions of the roads in Merrimac?

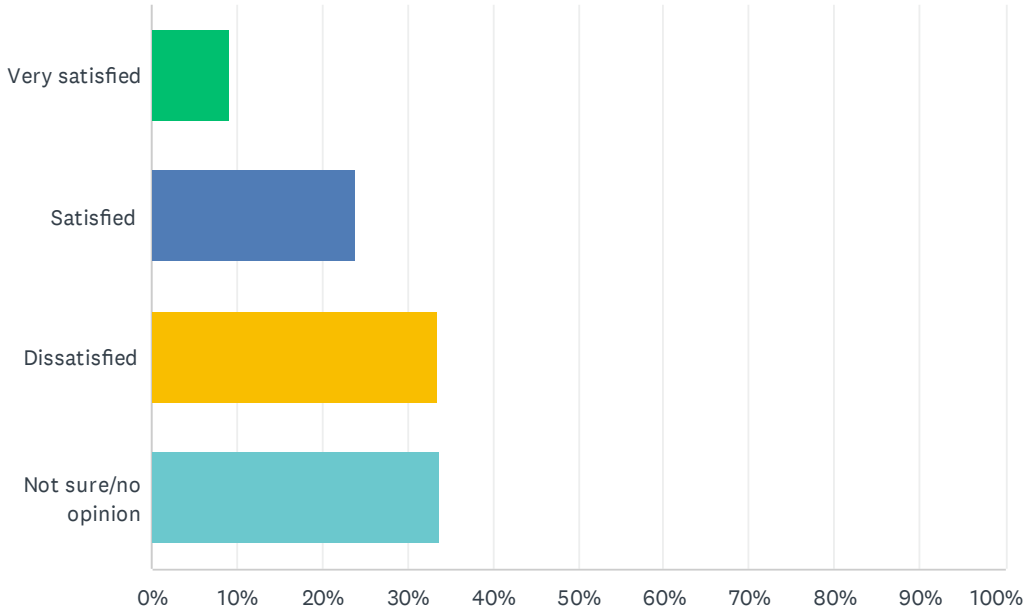
Answered: 453 Skipped: 37



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very satisfied	3.75%	17
Satisfied	38.41%	174
Dissatisfied	54.53%	247
Not sure/no opinion	3.31%	15
TOTAL		453

Q10 How satisfied are you with the amount and quality of bicycle infrastructure (bike lanes, bike parking areas, signage, etc.) in Merrimac?

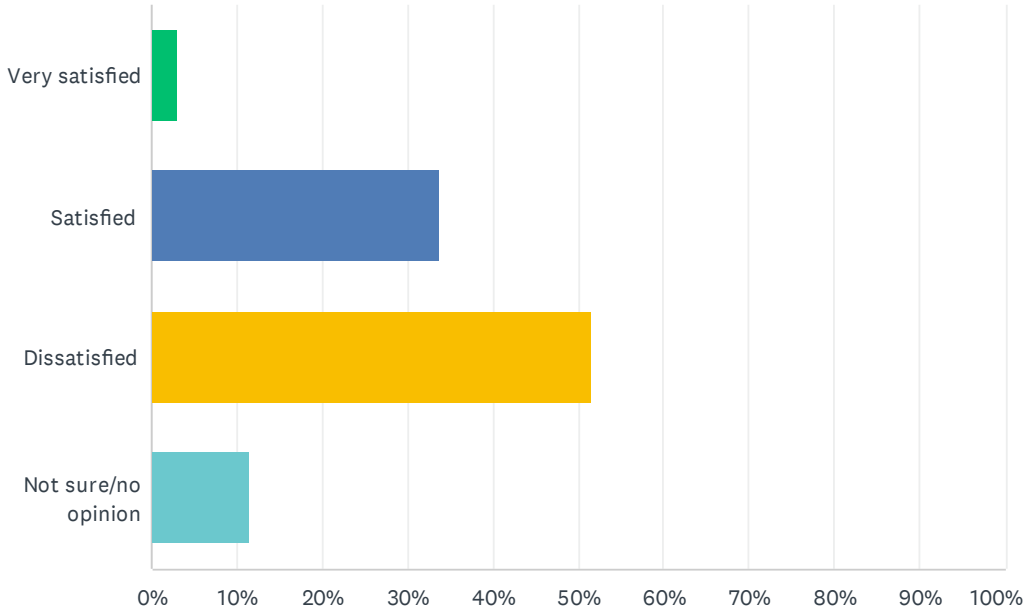
Answered: 452 Skipped: 38



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very satisfied	9.07%	41
Satisfied	23.89%	108
Dissatisfied	33.41%	151
Not sure/no opinion	33.63%	152
TOTAL		452

Q11 How satisfied are you with the quality and condition of the sidewalks in Merrimac?

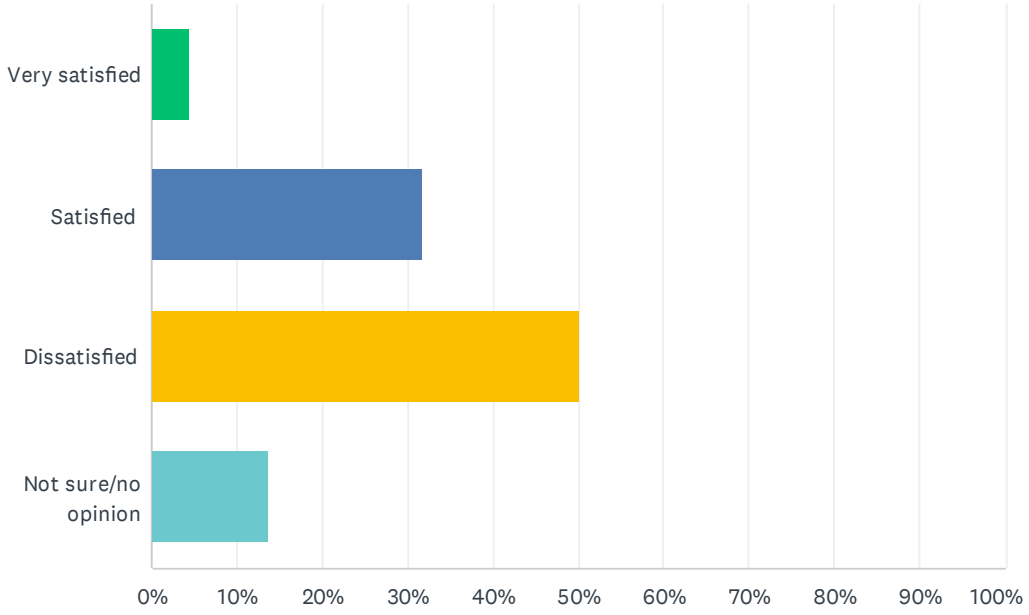
Answered: 453 Skipped: 37



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very satisfied	3.09%	14
Satisfied	33.77%	153
Dissatisfied	51.66%	234
Not sure/no opinion	11.48%	52
TOTAL		453

Q12 How satisfied are you with the number of sidewalks in Merrimac?

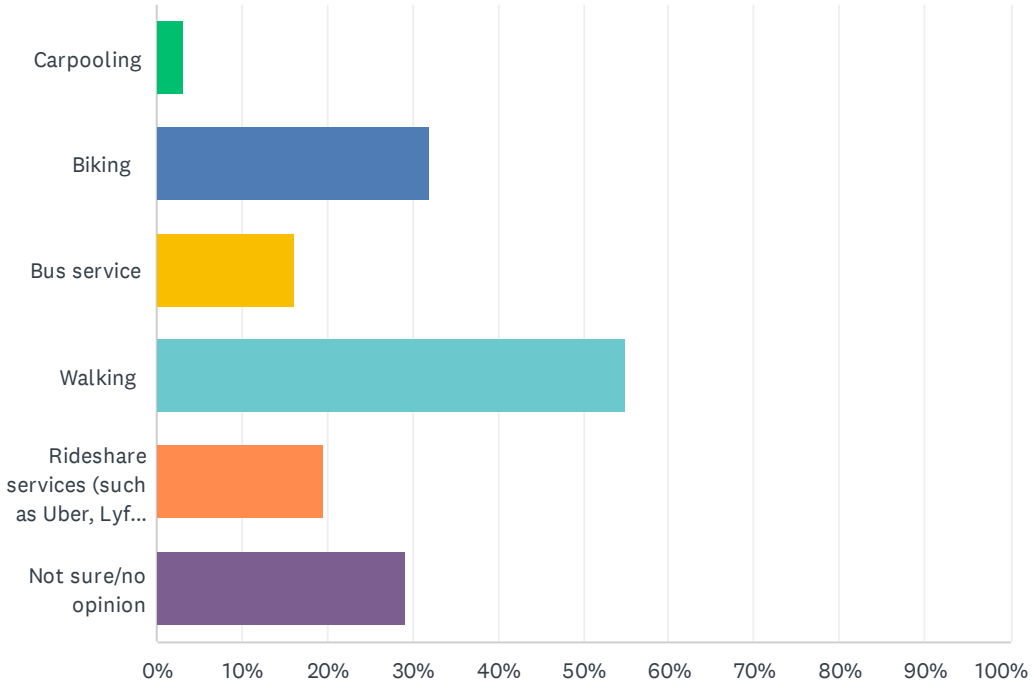
Answered: 451 Skipped: 39



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very satisfied	4.43%	20
Satisfied	31.71%	143
Dissatisfied	50.11%	226
Not sure/no opinion	13.75%	62
TOTAL		451

Q13 What types of transportation services or infrastructure would you like to see more of in Merrimac? Choose up to three.

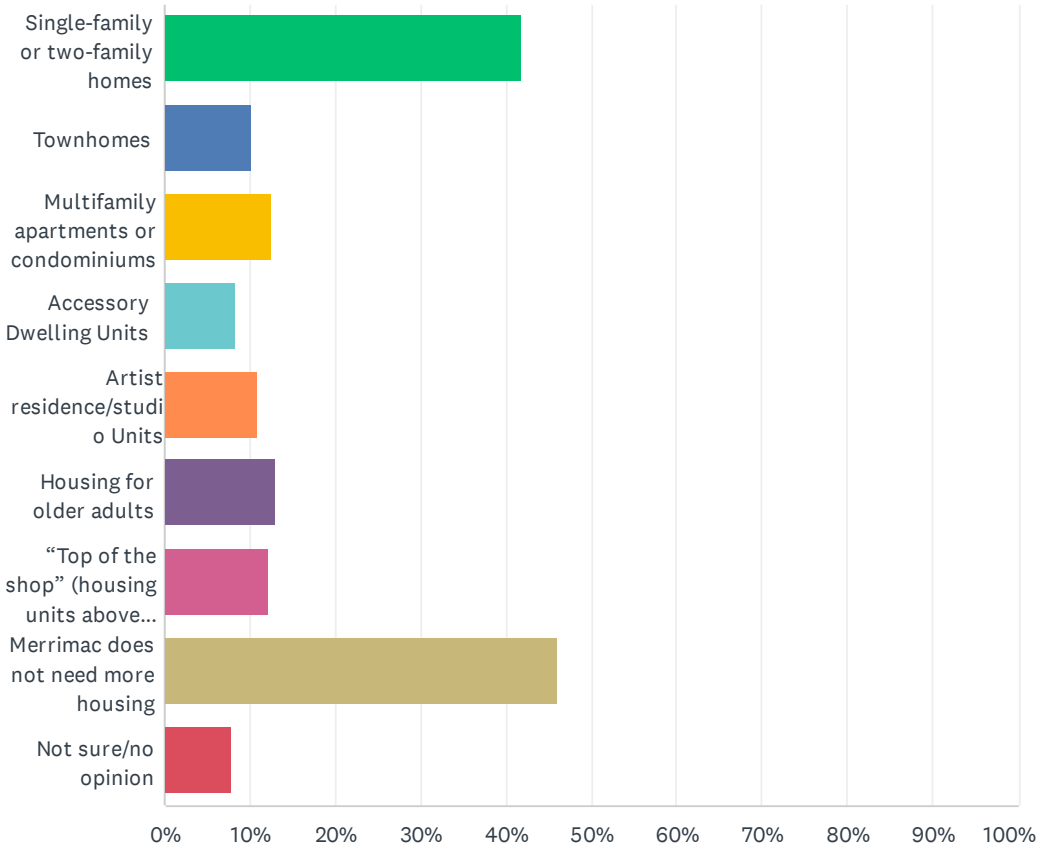
Answered: 455 Skipped: 35



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Carpooling	3.30%	15
Biking	32.09%	146
Bus service	16.26%	74
Walking	54.95%	250
Rideshare services (such as Uber, Lyft, etc.) or Taxi	19.56%	89
Not sure/no opinion	29.23%	133
Total Respondents: 455		

Q14 What kinds of housing does Merrimac need more of? Choose up to three.

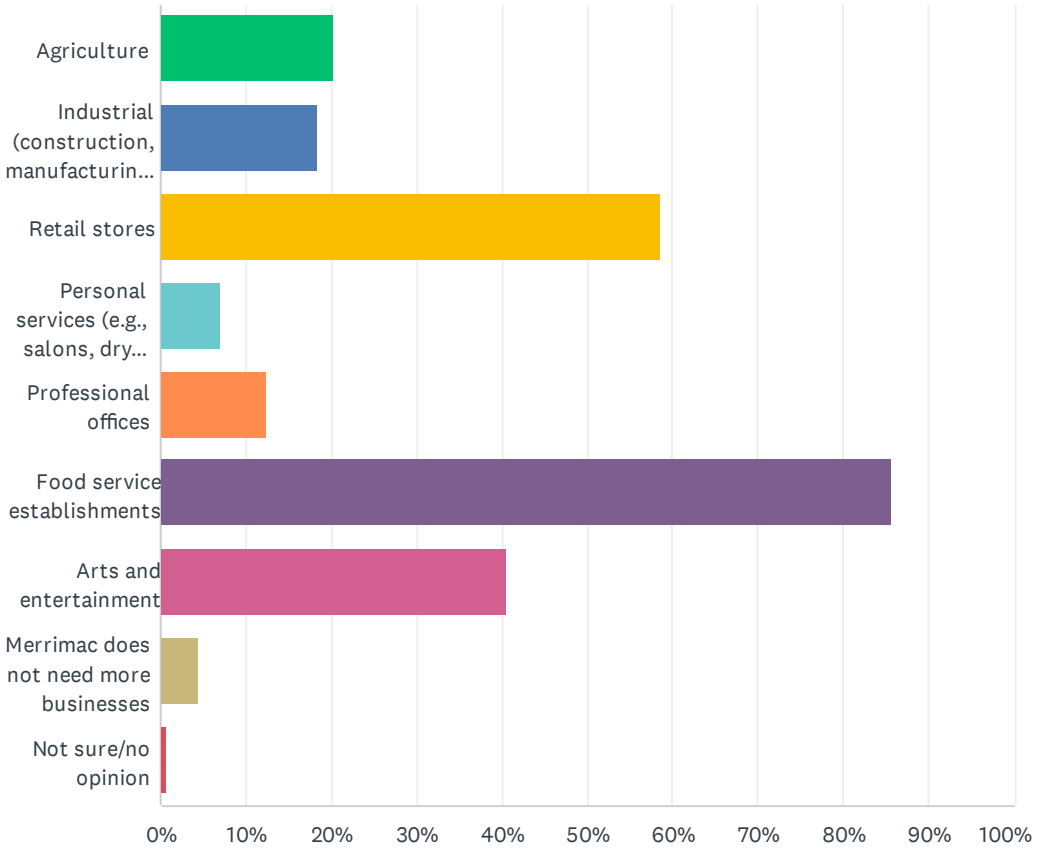
Answered: 455 Skipped: 35



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Single-family or two-family homes	41.76%	190
Townhomes	10.33%	47
Multifamily apartments or condominiums	12.53%	57
Accessory Dwelling Units	8.35%	38
Artist residence/studio Units	10.77%	49
Housing for older adults	12.97%	59
"Top of the shop" (housing units above businesses)	12.09%	55
Merrimac does not need more housing	46.15%	210
Not sure/no opinion	7.91%	36
Total Respondents: 455		

Q15 What kinds of business does Merrimac need more of? Choose up to three.

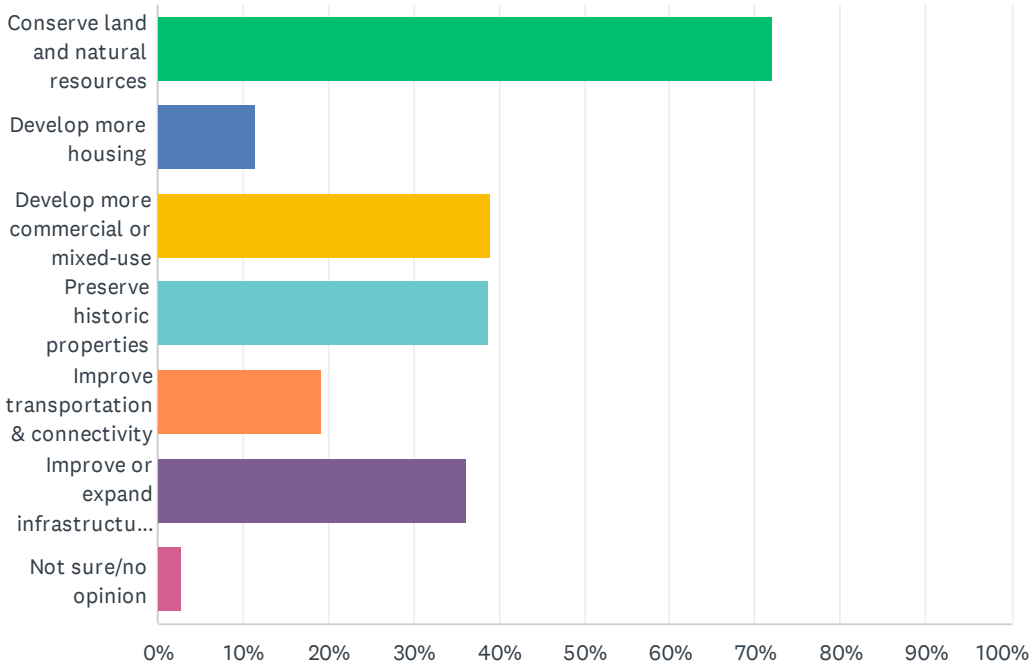
Answered: 455 Skipped: 35



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Agriculture	20.22%	92
Industrial (construction, manufacturing, warehousing, etc.)	18.24%	83
Retail stores	58.68%	267
Personal services (e.g., salons, dry cleaners, etc.)	7.03%	32
Professional offices	12.31%	56
Food service establishments	85.71%	390
Arts and entertainment	40.44%	184
Merrimac does not need more businesses	4.40%	20
Not sure/no opinion	0.66%	3
Total Respondents: 455		

Q16 Which of the following land use objectives are most important for Merrimac to pursue? Choose up to three.

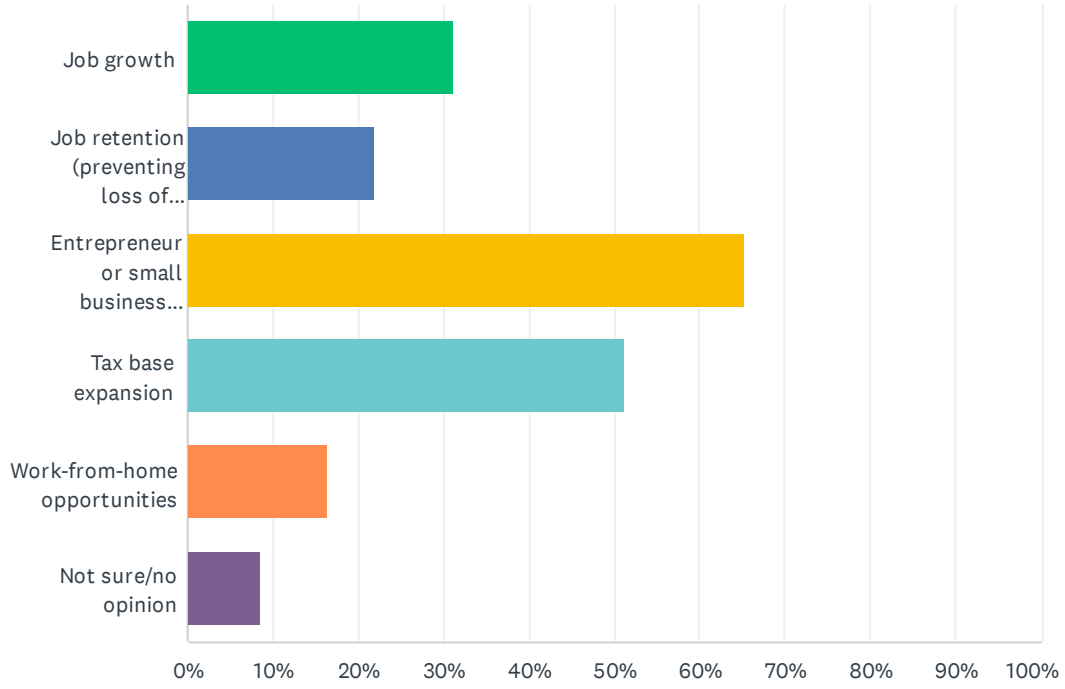
Answered: 455 Skipped: 35



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Conserve land and natural resources	72.09%	328
Develop more housing	11.43%	52
Develop more commercial or mixed-use	39.12%	178
Preserve historic properties	38.90%	177
Improve transportation & connectivity	19.12%	87
Improve or expand infrastructure capacity	36.26%	165
Not sure/no opinion	2.86%	13
Total Respondents: 455		

Q17 Which of the following economic development objectives are most important for Merrimac to pursue? Choose up to three.

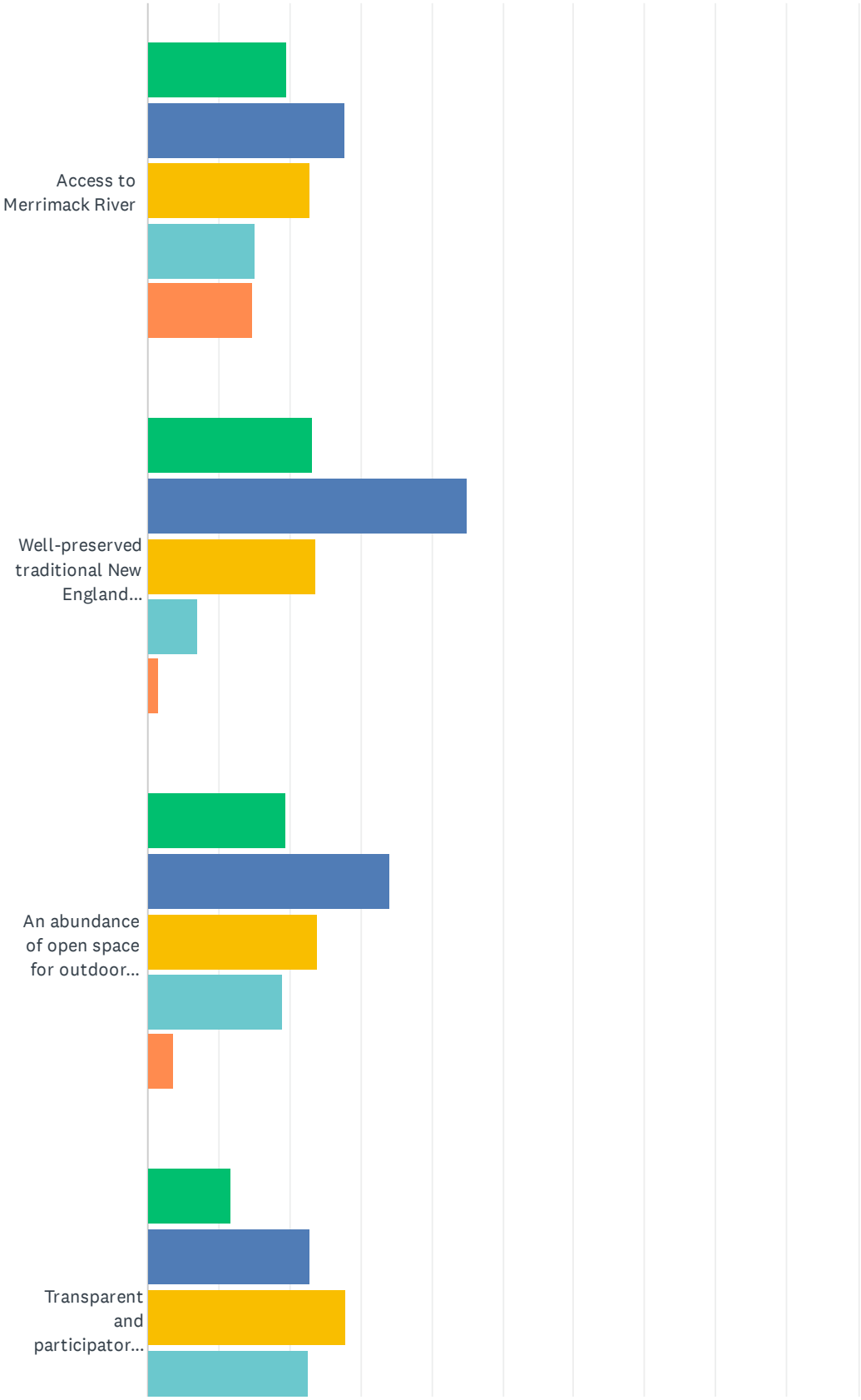
Answered: 455 Skipped: 35

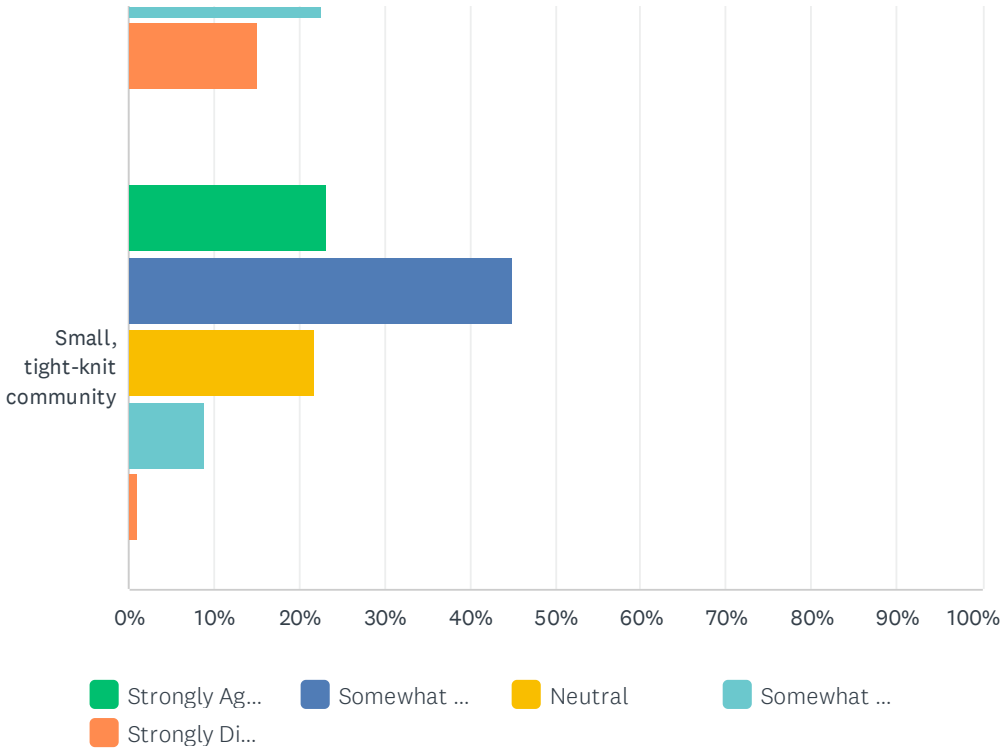


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Job growth	31.21%	142
Job retention (preventing loss of existing jobs)	21.98%	100
Entrepreneur or small business development	65.27%	297
Tax base expansion	51.21%	233
Work-from-home opportunities	16.48%	75
Not sure/no opinion	8.57%	39
Total Respondents: 455		

Q18 Strengths of Merrimac

Answered: 433 Skipped: 57

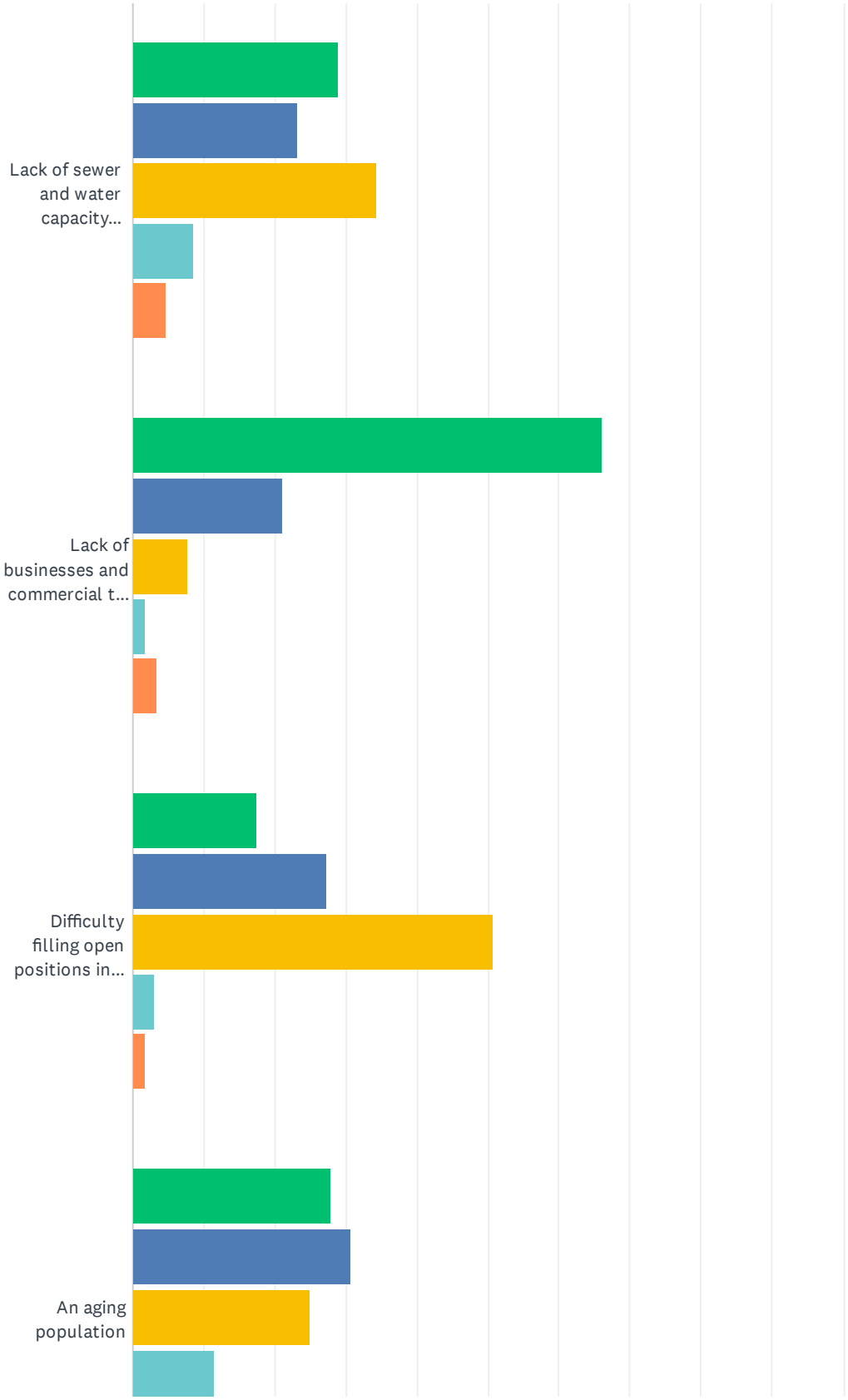


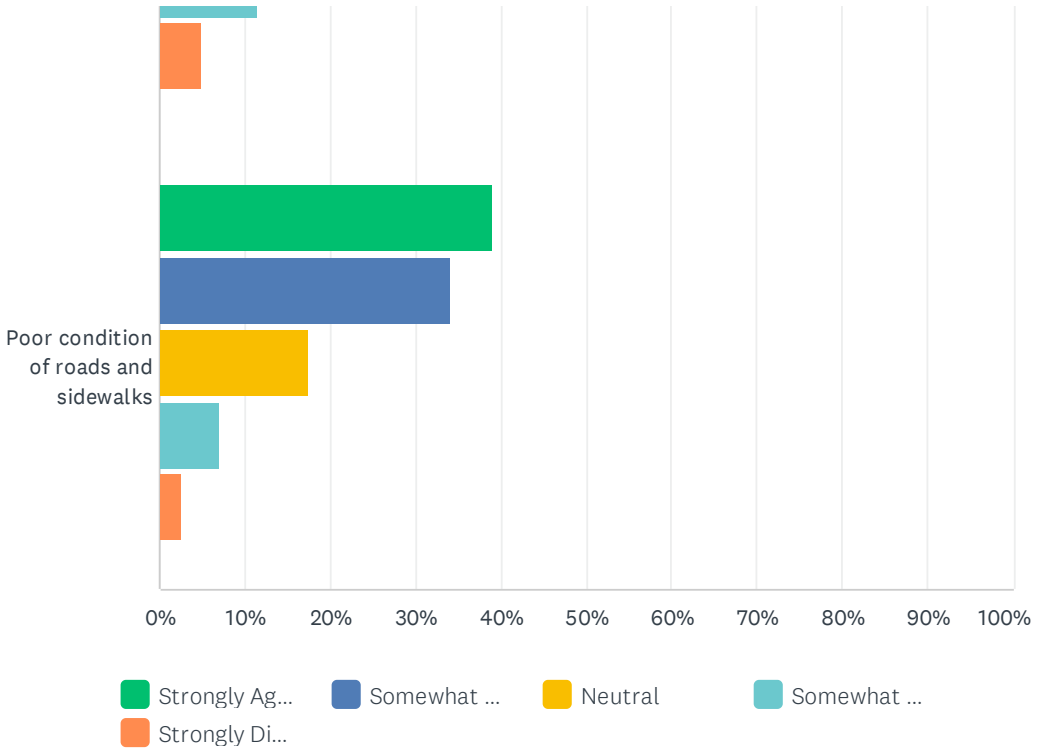


	STRONGLY AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEUTRAL	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
Access to Merrimack River	19.58% 84	27.74% 119	22.84% 98	15.15% 65	14.69% 63	429
Well-preserved traditional New England landscape and architecture	23.15% 100	44.91% 194	23.61% 102	6.94% 30	1.39% 6	432
An abundance of open space for outdoor recreation	19.44% 84	34.03% 147	23.84% 103	18.98% 82	3.70% 16	432
Transparent and participatory Town government	11.83% 51	22.74% 98	27.84% 120	22.51% 97	15.08% 65	431
Small, tight-knit community	23.31% 100	44.99% 193	21.68% 93	8.86% 38	1.17% 5	429

Q19 Weaknesses of Merrimac

Answered: 432 Skipped: 58

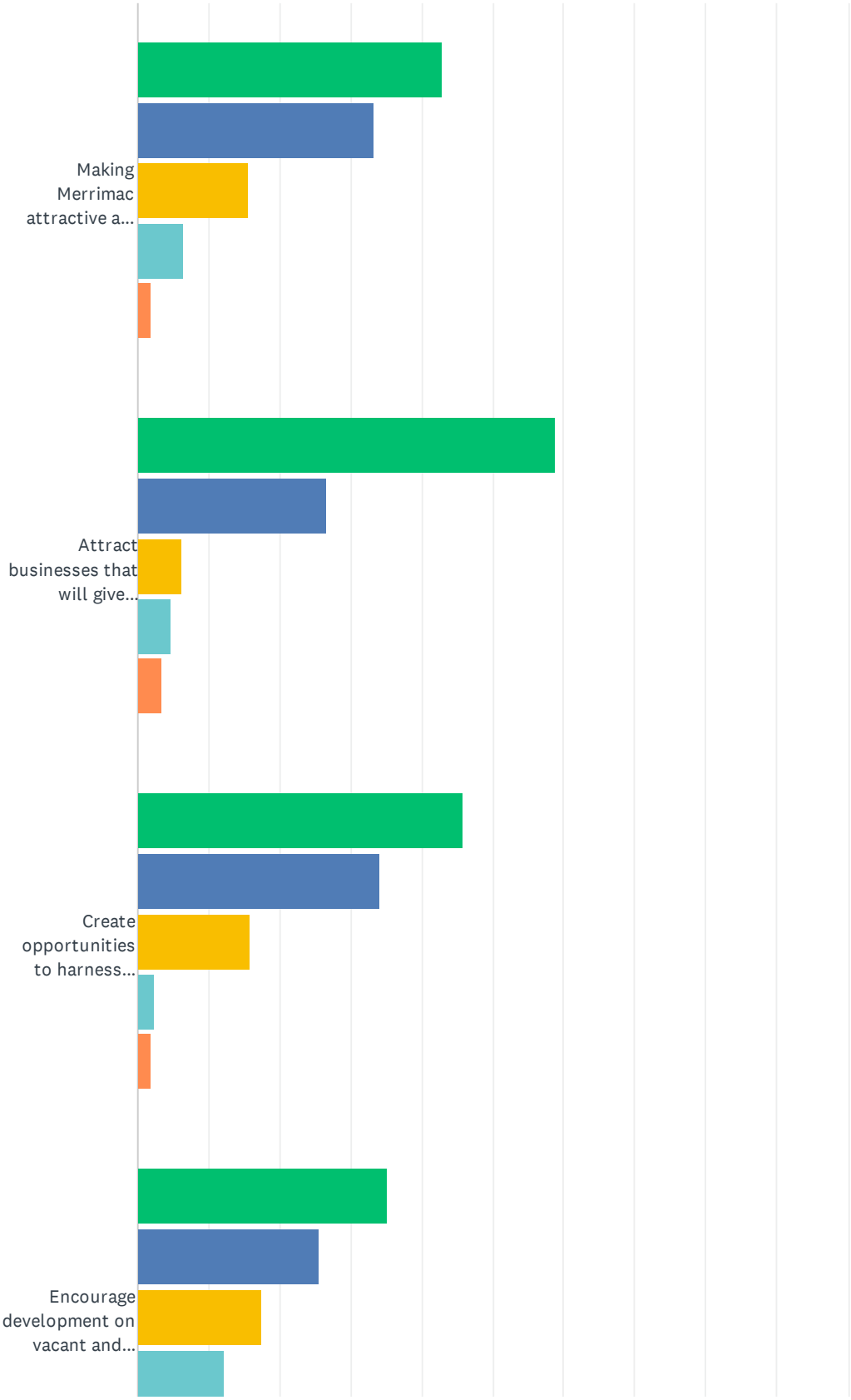


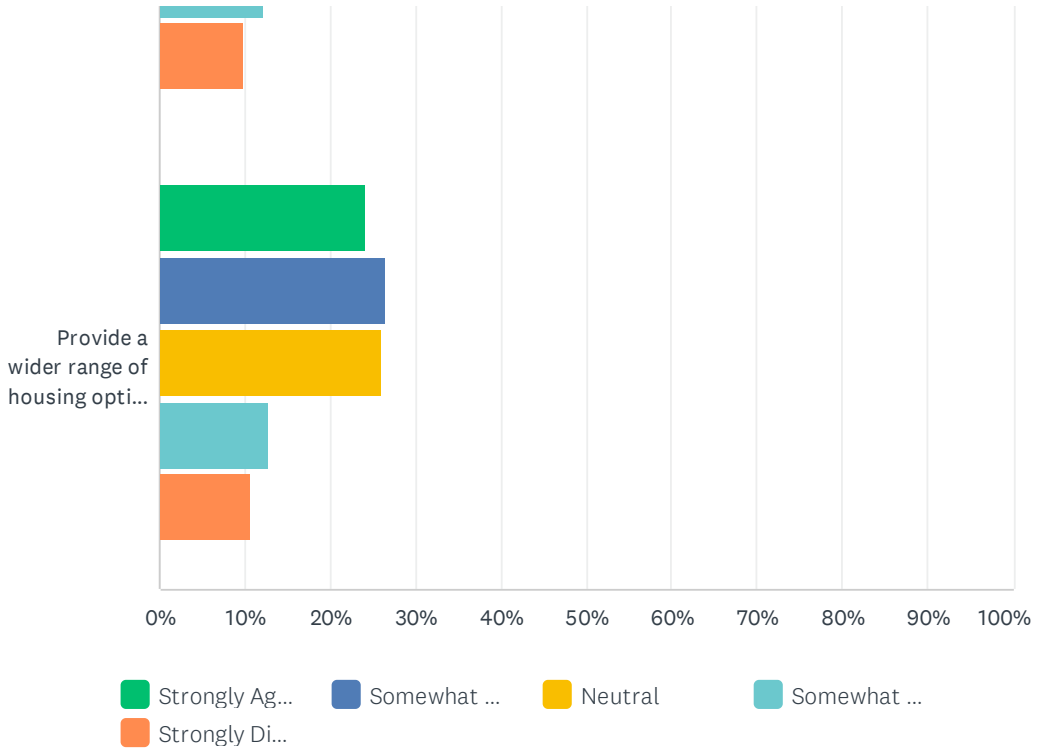


	STRONGLY AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEUTRAL	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
Lack of sewer and water capacity limiting development potential	29.07% 125	23.26% 100	34.42% 148	8.60% 37	4.65% 20	430
Lack of businesses and commercial tax revenue	66.20% 286	21.06% 91	7.64% 33	1.62% 7	3.47% 15	432
Difficulty filling open positions in Town government	17.44% 75	27.21% 117	50.70% 218	3.02% 13	1.63% 7	430
An aging population	27.93% 119	30.75% 131	24.88% 106	11.50% 49	4.93% 21	426
Poor condition of roads and sidewalks	38.93% 167	34.03% 146	17.48% 75	6.99% 30	2.56% 11	429

Q20 Opportunities for Merrimac

Answered: 433 Skipped: 57

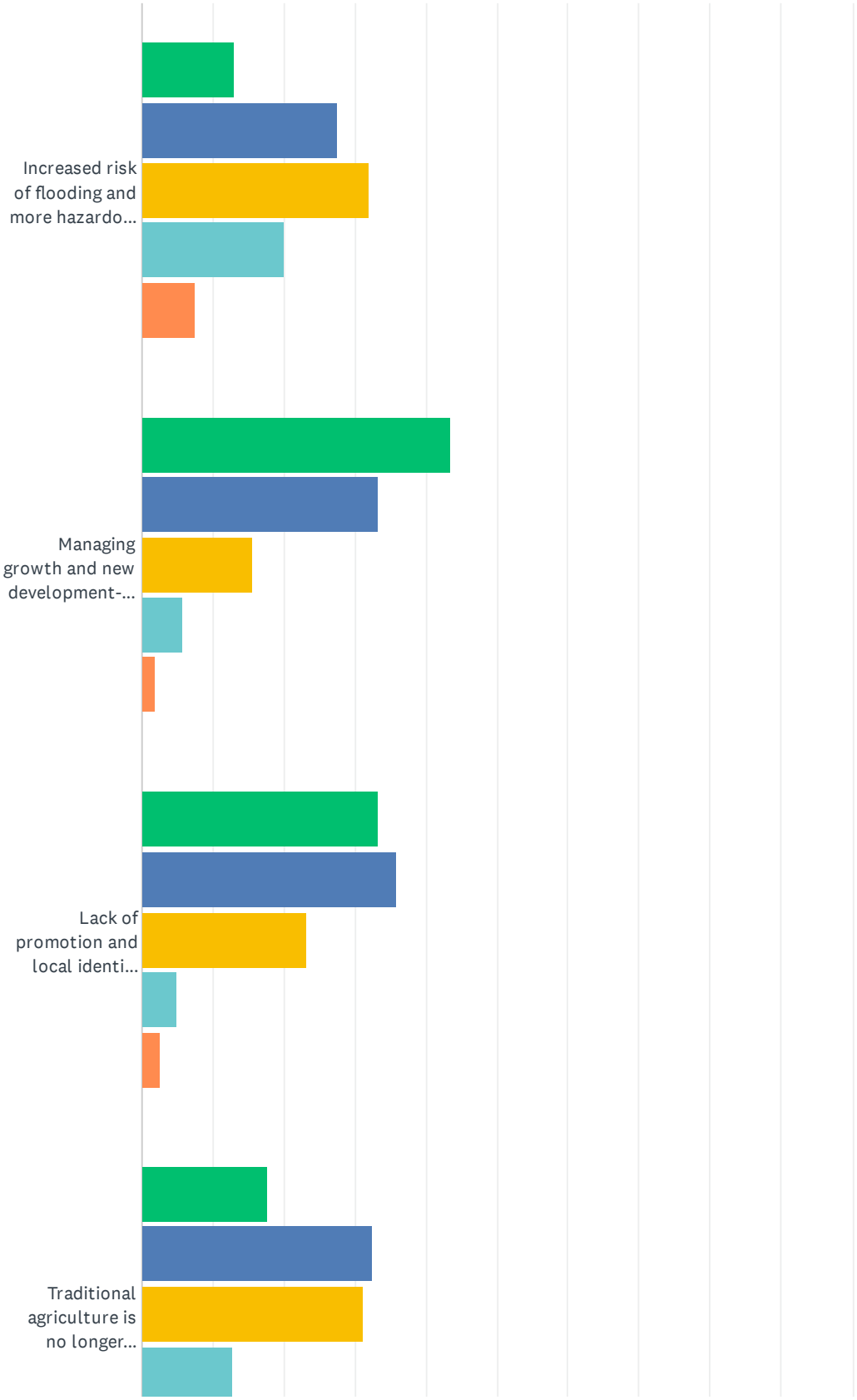


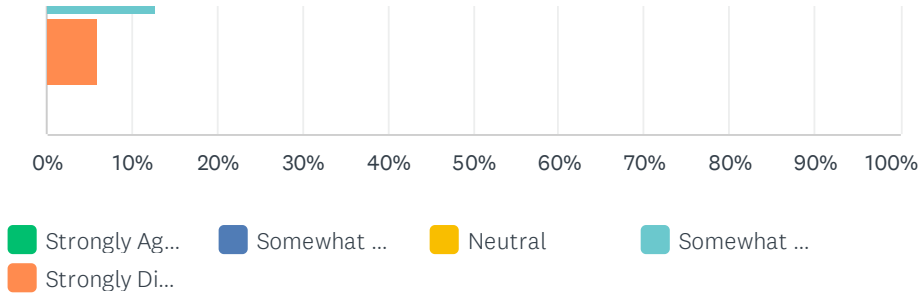


	STRONGLY AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEUTRAL	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
Making Merrimac attractive and viable for younger families to move there	42.92% 185	33.18% 143	15.55% 67	6.50% 28	1.86% 8	431
Attract businesses that will give people passing through Merrimac a reason to stop	58.93% 254	26.68% 115	6.26% 27	4.64% 20	3.48% 15	431
Create opportunities to harness local agriculture for food supply	45.94% 198	34.11% 147	15.78% 68	2.32% 10	1.86% 8	431
Encourage development on vacant and underutilized lots	35.12% 151	25.58% 110	17.44% 75	12.09% 52	9.77% 42	430
Provide a wider range of housing options for residents	24.07% 103	26.40% 113	25.93% 111	12.85% 55	10.75% 46	428

Q21 Threats in Merrimac

Answered: 432 Skipped: 58

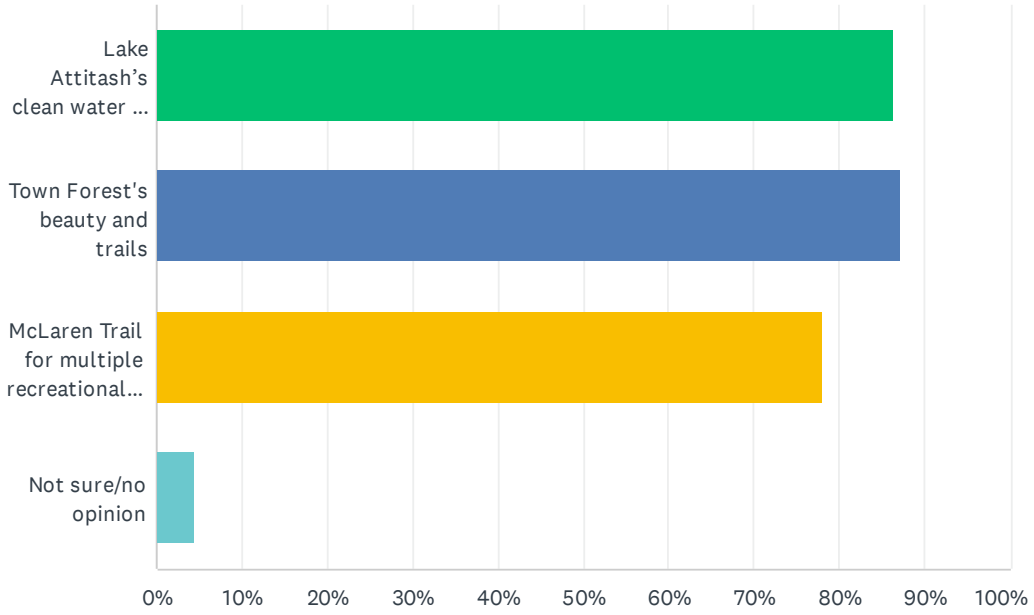




	STRONGLY AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEUTRAL	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
Increased risk of flooding and more hazardous storms that can cause lasting damage	13.05% 56	27.51% 118	31.93% 137	20.05% 86	7.46% 32	429
Managing growth and new development- figure out how to provide services and plan thoughtfully for new development.	43.52% 188	33.33% 144	15.51% 67	5.79% 25	1.85% 8	432
Lack of promotion and local identity to encourage visitors	33.33% 143	35.90% 154	23.31% 100	4.90% 21	2.56% 11	429
Traditional agriculture is no longer financially feasible	17.63% 76	32.48% 140	31.09% 134	12.76% 55	6.03% 26	431

Q22 Preserve: places that are important and valuable as they are, that should be protected as-is.

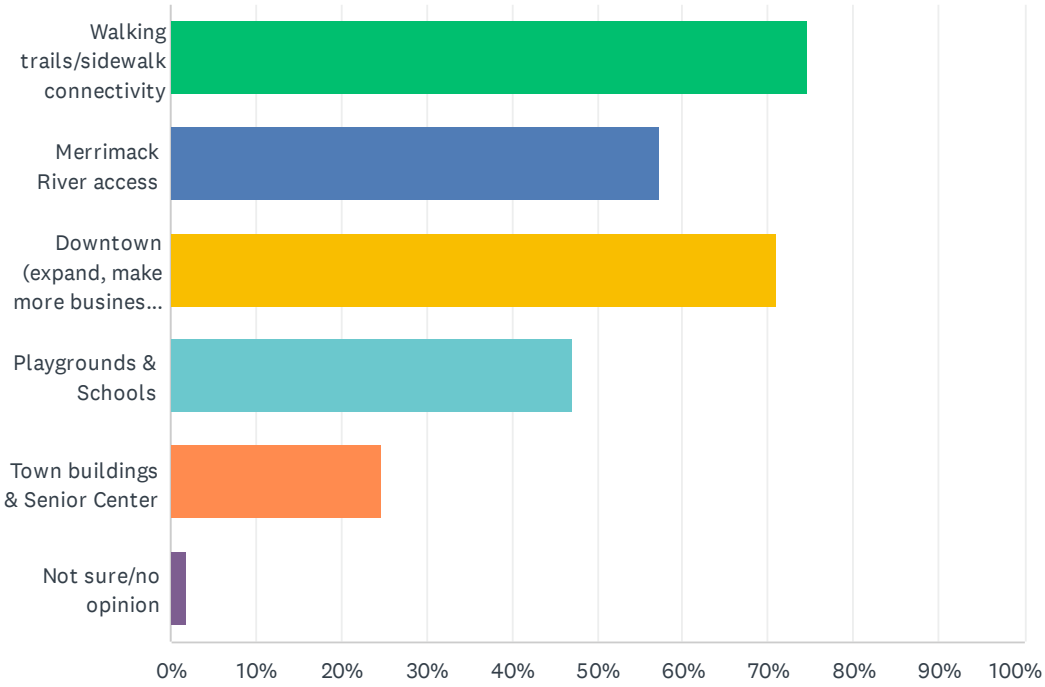
Answered: 419 Skipped: 71



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Lake Attitash's clean water and recreational opportunities	86.40%	362
Town Forest's beauty and trails	87.11%	365
McLaren Trail for multiple recreational purposes	78.04%	327
Not sure/no opinion	4.53%	19
Total Respondents: 419		

Q23 Improve: places that need maintenance, strengthening, adding amenities, etc.

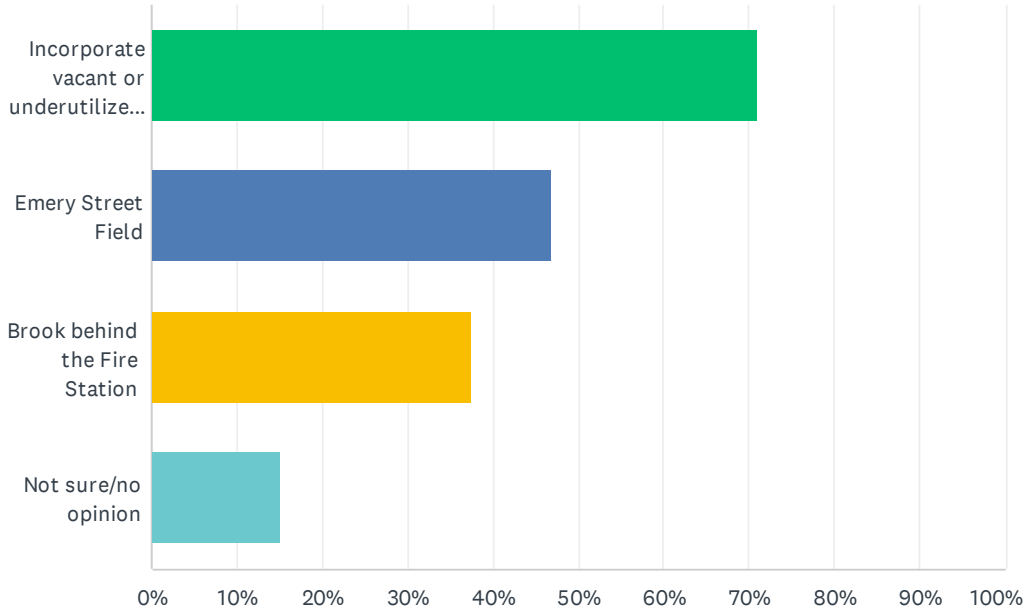
Answered: 423 Skipped: 67



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Walking trails/sidewalk connectivity	74.70%	316
Merrimack River access	57.45%	243
Downtown (expand, make more business friendly)	70.92%	300
Playgrounds & Schools	47.04%	199
Town buildings & Senior Center	24.82%	105
Not sure/no opinion	1.89%	8
Total Respondents: 423		

Q24 Transform: places where a major change of use or environment is desired, that will turn the location into a different type of place.

Answered: 416 Skipped: 74



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Incorporate vacant or underutilized properties into Downtown Merrimac	70.91%	295
Emery Street Field	46.88%	195
Brook behind the Fire Station	37.50%	156
Not sure/no opinion	15.14%	63
Total Respondents: 416		