



**MISSISSIPPI RIVER
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION**

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*Eugene Savage, Black River Falls, WI
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*James Scholmeier, Fountain City, WI
Vice Chairman*
*Vicki Burke, Onalaska, WI
Secretary & Treasurer*
*Greg Flogstad, Onalaska, WI
Director*

**MINUTES
MISSISSIPPI RIVER REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION (MRRPC)
BIMONTHLY MEETING
10:00 a.m., February 10, 2010
River Jacks, 1835 Rose Street, La Crosse, WI 54603**

Call to Order

Chairman Savage called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. and asked for the roll call. Greg Flogstad, Director of the MRRPC took roll and said a quorum was present. The attendance roster is attached.

Guests in attendance: Paul Wydeven, Wisconsin Department of Transportation; Tom Faella, director of the La Crosse Metropolitan Planning Organization; and Charlie Handy, La Crosse County Planning.

Minutes of October 14, 2009, Bimonthly Meeting

Commissioner Smith made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Leys, to accept the minutes of the October 14, 2009, bimonthly meeting. Approved unanimously.

Treasurer's Report

Chairman Savage asked Secretary-Treasurer Burke to present the treasurers reports. Ms. Burke reviewed the activity on the MRRPC treasurer's reports from October 2009 through January 2010. Ms. Burke said the October 1, 2009 balance in all MRRPC accounts was \$174,771.48 and the October 31, 2009 ending balance was \$179,461.07. Ms. Burke reported that the beginning balance in November 2009 was \$179,461.07 and the balance in all accounts at month's end was \$164,081.37. Ms. Burke reported that the beginning balance in December 2009 was \$179,461.07 (this was an error in transcription, and should have been \$164,081.37-See New Business, Page 4) and the balance in all accounts at month's end was \$150,235.39. Ms. Burke reported that the beginning balance in January 2010 was \$150,235.39 and the balance in all accounts at month's end was \$270,969.49.

Ms. Burke then presented the financial report for the Business Capital Fund. The balance in this account as of October 1, 2009 was \$100,754.09. From October 2009 through January 2010, activity in this account included loan repayments of \$47,857.24, account interest of \$211.24, and an annual BCF Corporation filing fee of \$10.00. The ending balance in the Business Capital Fund as of January 31, 2010, was \$148,812.57. Ms. Burke said that as of October 1, 2009, the Business Capital Fund II RLF had a balance of \$43,008.53. She said that from October 2009 through January 2010, interest on this account totaled \$79.25 and loan repayments of \$9,878.28, leaving a January 31, 2010, balance of \$52,966.06.

The CMV Growth Development Fund began with a September 8, 2009, balance of \$54,847.30. Ms. Burke said that from the period of September 8, 2009, through January 12, 2010, interest earned on this account totaled \$28.48, loan payments of \$810.04 were made, \$605 was transferred to CMV Sequester Account, and a check order of \$11.35 was issued, leaving a January 12, 2010, balance of \$55,069.47. Ms. Burke said the balance in the CMV-EDA Sequestered Fund as of September 8, 2009, was \$145,919.72. During the period of September 8, 2009, through January 12, 2010, activity in this account consisted of interest earned

of \$75.70, a \$605 deposit (transfer of funds from CMV RLF Account), and a payment of \$46.33 to the U.S. Treasury leaving a balance of \$146,554.09.

Ms. Burke said the La Crosse County Economic Development Fund began with a September 11, 2009 balance of \$38,581.13. During the period of September 11, 2009 through January 13, 2010, loan repayments of \$4,280.00 were made and interest earned totaled \$27.32. The ending account balance as of January 13, 2010, was \$42,888.45. Chairman Savage asked for a motion of approval on the treasurers reports presented. Commissioner Nickelatti made a motion to approve the treasurers reports as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Scholmeier and approved unanimously.

Bryan Law, MRRPC's Economic Development Planner gave a report on revolving loan fund (RLF) activity since the last bimonthly meeting. The MRRPC has purchased Portfol to help in managing the loans through the BCF, CMV, Monroe County, and La Crosse County revolving loan funds. This software was first developed by the City of Philadelphia for handling this very type of loan activity, and it is now marketed to other governmental agencies. This software will allow the MRRPC to better standardize information on the loans, and promises to make reports to the EDA comprehensive and more informative. In early December, three of the MRRPC staff took part in a basic orientation to Portfol. Staff began the process of converting existing loans to the Portfol database in December and January, but a database crash a few weeks ago caused the loss of all the information that had been entered. After learning of some ways to protect the data from Portfol, staff are beginning the task of re-entering the information.

Mr. Law said that no loans were made from the Business Capital Fund. He said the BCF Board continues to examine its administrative plan and bylaws for ways to change them to more accurately reflect the economic realities of the region. He said the Economic Development Administration recommends this be done every five years. He said the recommendations will be discussed at the next Board meeting at which time they can be approved.

Mr. Law reported that the CMV Growth Fund held its annual meeting on December 16, 2009. One of the topics at the meeting was marketing efforts that the CMV can make to promote itself, attract new borrowers, and thus stimulate more economic development in Crawford, Monroe, and Vernon Counties. In recent weeks, a loan application has come in for Premier Meats, a new meat-processing business in Vernon County, between Viroqua and Westby. The loan would be for \$100,000, which would allow the amount held in the CMV Sequestered Fund to be reduced.

Mr. Law reported that on January 21, 2010, the Monroe County RLF approved a \$100,000 loan for Specialty Food to construct a new distribution center in Sparta. This project totaled almost \$4 million, and would result in almost 20 jobs by the second year.

MRRPC 2010 Budget

Mr. Flogstad presented the proposed budget for 2010. He pointed out that the Planning Program Income would decrease from 2009, since many of the communities in the Region had completed their comprehensive plans, and that only a few were still being written. He pointed out that Hazard Mitigation and Recovery planning budget would increase this year, and that federal funding would decline as the Food Processing Industry Cluster grant runs out in the spring. On the expenses side, Mr. Flogstad pointed to an increase in the Office Equipment & Software line, since the staff will be engaging in a new mapping technology that will require an upgrade to some of the computers in the office.

Commissioner Leys asked if a recent alleged embezzlement of flood recovery funds at a Crawford County church would involve any money from the MRRPC. Mr. Flogstad said it would not, because that money most likely went from the government straight to the churches and never involved the MRRPC. Commissioner Christenson pointed out some addition errors on the 2009 budget being used for comparison and provided the correct numbers, but these would not impact the 2010 budget that was being voted on. Commissioner Ehram made a motion to approve the proposed 2010 budget. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Christenson and approved unanimously.

Presentation by Robert Fisher in the Midwest Regional Rail System Project involving the Chicago-to-Twin Cities route.

Mr. Fisher described the effort to build high-speed rail (speeds up to 110 miles per hour) connecting Chicago and Minneapolis-St. Paul. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA, or the "Stimulus Package"), has granted \$8 billion nation-wide for high-speed rail development. He said that high-speed rail works best on relatively short runs between two major cities – so the Chicago-to-Twin Cities route is a logical corridor. The Midwest Regional Rail Initiative of 1995 and 2004 has identified this as a prime route.

A debate has ensued as to whether the route from Madison to the Twin Cities should go through La Crosse or Eau Claire. Eau Claire may be better served with a line going from Green Bay to the Twin Cities, which would allow Eau Claire to have a commuter-style rail connection with the Twin Cities, as seems to be Eau Claire's interest to some degree.

Mr. Fisher then introduced Tom Faella, director of the La Crosse Metropolitan Planning Organization. Mr. Faella reiterated that the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative has a plan that involves high-speed rail going through La Crosse. This effort would require following Federal Rail Administration (FRA) rules. The first step in this process is a service-level NEPA study, which involves studying multiple corridors and proposing a preferred route. Both Minnesota and Wisconsin applied for \$600,000 to conduct this study, which they would match with \$300,000 each, and won the award. Minnesota's Department of Transportation will administer the project and put out a request for proposals to find a consultant to conduct the study. The study should be completed by September 2010, which is the same time as the next opportunity for FRA funding; but it might be early 2011 before the study is completed. The second step would be to perform a preliminary engineering study, which would cost about \$50 million, which could be paid through FRA grants.

Commissioner Leys asked whether or not Rochester, MN, should be considered as part of the high-speed line. Mr. Fisher said that such a prospect is not as "shovel ready," and thus may not be as cost beneficial. It would require right-of-way acquisition (both length and widths that would be safe enough for high-speed rail), and would likely be a more expensive and slower process. The proposed River Route (i.e., the option that would go through La Crosse, Winona, and Red Wing) would use mostly existing right-of-way and infrastructure in such a way that makes the project much likely less expensive, and therefore more attainable.

Charlie Handy of La Crosse County Planning said it is very important to keep freight and passenger travel on the same routes, and keeping them both viable. Secondly, he said that frequency of service is important. Six trains a day going through La Crosse would provide many more opportunities for people to travel. If the River Route option were chosen, communities not on the high-speed line would still see an increase in the level of commuter-style rail options. He said that rail service will probably come everywhere; but the important question is where the high-speed rail would go. He said the best place to put the high-speed rail is where we can put it now, and this points to the River Route, because most of the infrastructure is already in place. If the stakeholders can agree on the placement of the route, that route has a much better chance at getting funding; if there is insurmountable disagreement, Wisconsin and Minnesota will lose their share of the money and see it go to California or Florida instead.

Mr. Flogstad went over an analysis of the two routes that showed the River Route being more cost beneficial based on lower land acquisition and construction costs, more intergovernmental cost sharing revenues from Minnesota, less negative environmental impacts, and more service to all residents in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Commissioner Leys asked if there was enough demand for increased frequency of rail travel. Mr. Handy said that multiple studies have shown that sufficient demand exists to make rail travel feasible. Mr. Fisher pointed out that rail travel at the commuter and interstate levels has proven successful in every market in which it has been introduced, with one exception in Nashville.

Decision on Resolution 2.10.2010 pertaining to the Midwest Regional Rail System project involving the route from Chicago to the Twin Cities.

Commissioner Leys made a motion to approve the resolution. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Burke and approved on a majority vote, 15-4. Commissioners Baker, Kuhn, Purdy, and Schnitzler voted "Nay"; the remaining commissioners voted "Yea."

Decision on support of State Legislation to remove county funding of regional planning commissions from the state revenue caps imposed on counties.

Mr. Flogstad reported that regional planning commissions (RPCs) in Wisconsin are threatened in their level of funding from counties by the introduction of county levy caps. Currently, RPCs serve the people of Wisconsin with an amount of county funding that is less than \$1 per person. Meanwhile, RPCs bring to their counties more than \$45 in federal money for every \$1 the counties provide for the RPCs. The Association of Wisconsin's Regional Planning Commissions advocates legislation that would remove RPC funding from Wisconsin counties' levy caps.

Commissioner Leys made a motion to approve the recommendation of the Association of Wisconsin Regional Planning Commissions' white paper. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Burke and approved unanimously.

Decision on MRRPC and Wisconsin DOT Work Program Contract.

Mr. Flogstad explained that Peter Fletcher could not be at the meeting, due to his father having a mild heart attack the night before. Mr. Flogstad explained that the state Department of Transportation had approved the 2010 Regional Transportation Work Program.

Commissioner Murray made a motion to approve the DOT Work Program Contract. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Scholmeier and approved unanimously.

Report on daily commuter bus route project to serve La Crosse, Vernon, and Crawford Counties.

Mr. Faella presented on the commuter bus system proposed by the Regional Transit Coordinating Committee (RTCC). Public busses are going back and forth between counties, and better coordination might be established. The RTCC is investigating the possibility of a single route that would serve the public on a call-in basis. The RTCC wants to see this start in March of 2010.

Commissioner Kuhn asked if this would be in addition to the current service to the elderly, disabled, and others that is currently available. Mr. Faella said that it might provide similar service, but would result in an increase of service, not a decrease. Commissioner Kuhn asked if potential conflicts with various sources had been solved. Commissioner Krachey commented that this project is designed to solve these conflicts among the various providers so one county provider can serve other counties. Mr. Faella could not be sure of the details of funding, but had the understanding that the costs would be shared among the counties.

Report on potential grant from Wisconsin Department of Justice and subcontract with West Central Wisconsin RPC to accept Homeland Security Communications Interoperability Grant.

The purpose of this program is to improve communication between emergency responders in accordance with the 2007 Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan (SCIP). One issue that Mr. Flogstad pointed to was different law enforcement and emergency responders using different frequencies for communications, and that this project would create plans that would allow these agencies to better communicate with each other and with outside agencies as well.

Report on Food Resource and Agri-business Network – Industry Cluster Initiative.

Mr. Law said FRAN members are investigating cooperative shrink wrap recycling. He said this is exciting because the savings and possibilities for some revenue should be pretty significant. He said that the six companies who showed early interest in the project create a total of seven semi-trailers full of baled shrink-wrap a year. This project would not only keep that material out of landfills, it would reduce costs to the companies by saving them the waste disposal charges, as well as generate about \$57,000

annually in sales to recyclers. The FRAN network met December 10, and Dean Swenson of Midwest Recycling Association discussed how his nonprofit organization works with municipalities to get the best value from their recyclables. After meeting by phone in January with MRRPC staff and Midwest Recycling Association to discuss their steps moving forward, three FRAN member companies have decided to work with Midwest Recycling Association for a six-month, no-fee trial period. The companies will use this trial period to figure out how best to arrange pick-ups of the shrink-wrap from their various locations.

Mr. Law said that the FRAN website design effort continues. The MRRPC sent out a request for proposals in October, and received 6 proposals from potential web designers. In reviewing the proposals, the FRAN membership narrowed the field to the top three candidates, who were invited in for interviews. After consideration of the best balance of price, functionality, and simplicity of design, Gathering Waters Design, Inc., emerged as the winner. The FRAN group expects a website that will include member-interaction functions, such as a bulletin board and comments to blog postings, as well as allowing FRAN website administrators to edit the site themselves (i.e., without incurring a maintenance fee from Gathering Waters) all for about \$5000. At the December 10 FRAN meeting, Pam Culver from Gathering Waters provided a few pages that were mock-ups of what the website would look like. As currently envisioned, the site would have a message board and/or blog comments behind the password protection, but more such areas of the site could be added. Gathering Waters plans to build the site using Adobe Contribute, which will allow FRAN to maintain the site itself.

Mr. Law reported that FRAN members have indicated their interest in conducting a strategic plan. UW-Stout Northwest manufacturing Outreach Center has conducted these in the past, and they cost about \$1000. The process would involve: individual consultation with FRAN companies; sending out a survey; and a half-day or day-long session to plan the process with 10 or 12 companies and set an agenda. The final product of this effort would be a planning document.

Mr. Law said that OSHA training programs have been underway at Western Technical College, funded by a Workforce Advancement Training Grant of \$18,000. The project covers fall prevention, confined space, ammonia refrigeration, and fire prevention-extinguisher training. The FRAN members agreed that WTC should apply for another training grant this year.

Finally, Mr. Law explained that the MRRPC had submitted its draft of the report for the FRAN grant to the EDA at the end of January, and that the final draft will be due at the end of February.

Kickapoo Valley Regional Economic Development Initiative (KVREDI) and long-term flood recovery projects in Gays Mills and La Farge.

MRRPC staff provided assistance to the Kickapoo Valley Regional Economic Development Initiative (KVREDI) in securing a \$25,000 Ralph Nuzum Foundation Grant. Should KVREDI secure additional funding from sources such as the USDA Rural Development program, state CDBG funds, and the EDA, then the Ralph Nuzum Foundation would increase its grant to \$50,000. This project would likely involve a study of the Kickapoo Valley's current economic activities and potential developments in the future. The major industries that will be studied are Recreation and Tourism, Agriculture and Food Processing, Forest and Wood Products, and Biofuels. These are the economic drivers that are most likely to build a stronger economy in the years to come. MRRPC staff are assembling an inventory of economic strengths and weaknesses in the Valley, as identified in survey responses from KVREDI members. One KVREDI member, the Kickapoo Valley Association, has expressed a desire to take the lead in efforts to obtain grant funding for bicycle and hiking trail improvements in the Valley.

Mr. Law said a grant application was submitted to the Economic Development Administration in June 2009 for the Village of La Farge for an infrastructure project connected to economic recovery from disastrous flooding in both 2007 and 2008. The project has three components: (1) extension of road, water, and sewer lines to serve a new 5000-square-foot, \$4.6 million research and development facility to be constructed by Organic Valley, which would allow the company to hire 40 new employees over the next 3 years; (2) replacing a water reservoir feeder main to Organic Valley and rehabilitation of the Village of La Farge's water reservoir to accommodate future growth planned by Organic Valley; (3) capacity improvements to the Village's wastewater treatment plant to handle Organic Valley's rapid rate of growth, as well as other business and residential growth in the Village. The MRRPC has received several requests from the EDA for more documents since September, with what seems to be the final

package submitted in recent weeks. The next step is for the EDA counsel to review the application for any deficiencies, allow us to remedy them, and then present a recommendation to approve or reject the application. The final decision would come from the federal office.

Status of contracts with La Crosse County Towns to implement their comprehensive plans.

Mr. Flogstad said that the planning continues with La Crosse County Towns that need to expend grant funds for plan implementation. He has met recently with Medary.

Status of Comprehensive Plans: Towns of Albany, Lima (Pepin County); Greenfield (La Crosse County); Town of Byron (Monroe County); Towns of Clayton and Prairie du Chien and the Village of Gays Mills (Crawford County); City of Blair-Trempealeau County Comprehensive Plan

Mr. Bonifas said he has been assisting the Towns of Albany and Lima in Pepin County and the Town of Greenfield in La Crosse County prepare their comprehensive plans. All three plans have been adopted since the October Commission meeting. All that remains to do is to send them their printed copies and to supply Greenfield with some larger maps. Lima had an issue with its working lands initiative. The meetings were poorly attended, until the meeting at which they were to vote on adoption, when 30 people attended. One of the members of the planning committee wanted to delay the working lands initiative because of perceived threats to farm land in the proposal.

Mr. Law said he has been working with the City of Blair on their comprehensive plan. The final draft of the City of Blair comprehensive plan has been approved. A public hearing was held on Wednesday, October 28, 2009, at which the city's plan commission voted to recommend this plan to the City Council. The City Council met on Monday, November 9, 2009; at this meeting, the Council voted unanimously to adopt this plan. The copies have been mailed to the City.

Status of MRRPC application to the State of Wisconsin for a Regional Planning Grant.

Mr. Flogstad explained that he has not heard any news about the award of \$175,000 for a Regional Planning Grant, which the MRRPC applied for. Hopefully there will be more information in time for the April Commission meeting.

Report on County Comprehensive Plan Status in Crawford, Jackson, Pierce, Monroe, and Pepin Counties.

Mr. Bonifas reported that the Pierce County plan is complete. The Jackson and Monroe County Comprehensive Plans are moving ahead on schedule, according to the county administrators. They have been holding cluster meetings and setting goals, objectives, and policies. He said they expect to have their plans completed this year. Mr. Bonifas said they are posting meeting schedules, progress on the plans, and other information on their websites. Commissioner Leys mentioned that he expected the Crawford County Board to pass the plan at its next meeting.

Mr. Bonifas said the MRRPC staff is preparing a comprehensive planning grant application for Pepin County in connection with the application for the Regional Plan. That award is not expected until March.

Report on Town of Waterville, Pepin County Community Development Block Grant Award of \$690,000 for Flood Recovery Assistance to Properties, Homes, and Businesses Damaged by Flooding in August, 2009.

Mr. Law said MRRPC staff prepared a Community Development Block Grant-Emergency Assistance Grant (CDBG-EAP) Application for the Town of Waterville to assist the Town recover from the rain and flooding disaster that occurred in August of 2009. Forty residences suffered a range of damage, and the grant application asked for funds to repair homes, businesses, and public facilities. On November 30, 2009, the Wisconsin Department of Commerce announced that the Town had been awarded \$340,000 for housing repairs and \$310,000 for storm water system repairs and stabilization of Arkansaw Creek. In January of 2010, the Town of Waterville chose a consulting firm to administer the grant. The sewer line work began in the fall of 2009, in hopes of finishing before the full impact of winter. The remainder of the public works projects, along with the housing repair efforts, will occur as weather permits, probably starting in earnest in the spring of 2010. From then until the 2nd quarter of 2011, funds would be distributed to qualifying property owners.

Status of Crawford and Vernon Counties Multi Hazard Mitigation Plan Updates.

Mr. Bonifas said background data has been updated for the Crawford and Vernon County Multi Hazard Mitigation Plan Updates. He said the next step is to send out surveys to municipalities in both counties. He said a listing of projects they included in their first plan would be sent out for counties to review and update. The goal is to get new mitigation projects. Mr. Bonifas said both plans are ongoing but he expected to have both plans completed by the end of 2009.

Status of Pierce County Recreation Plan and Recycling Ordinance.

Mr. Bonifas said the draft of the Solid Waste Recycling Ordinance is prepared. Work has been delayed a bit because Mr. Bonifas's contact in Pierce County has undergone surgery recently. He should review the draft during his recuperation. After that, Mr. Bonifas said he should be able to send the draft to the County's corporate counsel next month. The County will have to repeal its old ordinance before adopting the new one, because the new one represents a major change. The Pierce County Outdoor Recreation Plan is drafted, awaiting a decision from the County. The plan consists of ways to improve outdoor recreation opportunities. The plan will incorporate municipal plans as well. Plans and projects from two Villages (Ellsworth and Elmwood), as well as the County itself, are still outstanding.

Status of Crawford, Pepin, Trempealeau, and Vernon Counties' Multi Hazard Mitigation Plan Updates.

Mr. Bonifas explained that a new intern will begin work this week, and her main task will be working on the Pepin County Hazard Mitigation Plan and the Monroe County Outdoor Recreation Plan. Grants for Outdoor Recreation Plans are due in the spring, so Mr. Bonifas encouraged anyone interested in such a plan to let him know as soon as possible.

Mr. Bonifas said that he has been working with Crawford, Trempealeau, and Vernon Counties on updating their existing hazard mitigation plans. Vernon County's draft is completed, and is awaiting approval from the County Board, the municipalities in the County, and Wisconsin Emergency Management (WEM). Crawford County's draft should be finished in a week or two, and the process will be the same as Vernon County's. This should all be finished in late-March or early-April. After the counties, municipalities, and WEM approve the plans, it is left to FEMA to approve them. Neither of these plans will involve many changes from the previous versions, and involve mostly updates to the background data, since it has been five years since the last version. The benefit of this is that, even though most of the information is not new, many of the people in the local governments are fairly new, so this process brings this important information to their attention.

Mr. Bonifas said that the Pepin Hazard Mitigation Plan has just gotten started, and is in the stage of assigning tasks and gathering background information.

Old Business.

Commissioner Savage asked if there was any update on the vacant seats on the Commission. Mr. Flogstad said there was not, despite his efforts to get a response from the Governor.

New Business.

Commissioner Leys suggested that, because the President and the Governor seem to be encouraging a rethinking about nuclear power, the Commission should consider ways to convert a power plant within the Region to nuclear, thus taking advantage of federal and state funding.

Mr. Flogstad commented that Vicki Burke just caught a transcription error in the December 2009 Treasurers Report involving the beginning balance that should have been \$164,081.37, not \$179,461.07. This error did not result in other errors on that page; the ending December balance of \$150,235.39 was correct.

Commissioner Baker made to motion adjourn. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Schroeder and passed unanimously.

This is to certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the February 10, 2010, bimonthly meeting minutes approved on the 14th day of April 2010.

Vicki Burke, Secretary-Treasurer