



## **MISSISSIPPI RIVER REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION**

1707 Main Street, Suite 435  
La Crosse, WI 54601  
Phone: (608) 785-9396  
Fax: (608) 785-9394  
Email: [plan@mrrpc.com](mailto:plan@mrrpc.com)  
Website: [mrrpc.com](http://mrrpc.com)

*Eugene Savage, Black River Falls, WI  
Chairman*  
*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**

**10:30 a.m., August 10, 2011**

**Midway Hotel La Crosse "River Jacks", 1835 Rose Street, La Crosse, Wisconsin**

#### **Call to Order**

Chairman Savage called the meeting to order at 10:30 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-SW Region; John Medinger representing U.S. Senator Herb Kohl; Will Cronin, Monroe County Community Resource Development Educator; Karl Green, La Crosse County UW-Extension Resource Agent.

#### **Minutes of June 8, 2011 Bimonthly Meeting**

Commissioner Kuhn made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Leys to accept the minutes of the June 8, 2011, bimonthly meeting. Approved unanimously.

#### **Treasurer's Report**

Vicki Burke, MRRPC Secretary/Treasurer presented the treasurers reports. Ms. Burke said the June 1, 2011 balance in all MRRPC accounts was \$264,778.80 and the June 30, 2011 ending balance was \$233,526.83. Ms. Burke reported that the beginning balance in July 2011 was \$233,526.83 and the balance in all accounts at month's end was \$217,630.82.

Ms. Burke then presented the financial report for the Business Capital Fund. The balance in this account as of May 31, 2011 was \$252,522.66. From June 2011 through July 2011 activity in this account included loan repayments of \$22,960.03 and account interest of \$199.21 leaving an ending balance in the Business Capital Fund as of July 31, 2011 of \$275,681.90. Ms. Burke said that as of May 31, 2011, the Business Capital Fund II RLF had a balance of \$90,476.81. She said that from June 2011 through July 2011 interest on this account totaled \$69.47 and loan repayments of \$4,365.42 were made leaving a July 31, 2011 balance of \$94,911.70.

The CMV Growth Development Fund began with a May 11, 2011, balance of \$55,687.19. Ms. Burke said from the period of May 11, 2011 through July 13, 2011 interest earned on this account totaled \$14.56 and loan payments made totaled \$1,205.02 leaving a July 13, 2011 balance of \$56,906.77. Ms. Burke said the balance in the CMV-EDA Sequestered Fund as of May 11, 2011 was \$155,420.11. During the period of May 11, 2011 through July 13, 2011 activity in this account consisted interest earned of \$40.24 leaving a balance of \$155,460.35.

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#### ***A Nine County Economic Development District Providing Assistance to Local Governments***

- *Land Use Planning* ▪ *Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances* ▪ *Transportation Planning* ▪ *Economic Development Planning*
- *GIS Mapping* ▪ *Recreation Planning* ▪ *Revolving Loan Fund Administration* ▪ *Grant Writing* ▪ *Socioeconomic Data Dissemination*
- *Assist Local Interests in Responding to State and Federal Programs* ▪ *Advisory Service on Local Planning Issues*
- *Coordinating Agency for Programs and Activities* ▪ *Public Advocacy on Issues Affecting Our Region*

Ms. Burke said the La Crosse County Economic Development Fund began with a May 16, 2011 balance of \$61,301.25. During the period of May 16, 2011 through July 13, 2011, loan repayments of \$3,573.33 were made and interest earned totaled \$25.52. The ending account balance as of July 13, 2011 was \$64,900.10. Chairman Savage asked for a motion of approval on the treasurers reports presented. Commissioner Schnitzler made a motion to approve the treasurer's reports as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Kuhn, and approved unanimously.

Bryan Law reported there hasn't been any new loan activity in the Business Capital Fund, Business Capital Fund 2, or the CMV Growth Development Fund. Mr. Law said his outreach continues to banks in the region to raise awareness of the funds including a mass mailing that went out to banks in early August. Mr. Law said he continues to attend entrepreneur club meetings and other economic development organization meetings etc. to promote the funds.

### **Video Presentation on the Bio-Fuel Pellet Industry in the Steeped Slope Country of Austria and the Feasibility of Replication in the Mississippi River Region**

Director Flogstad provided an overview of a video presentation on the bio-fuel pellet industry in the country of Austria. He explained that Paul Bader, President of the Kickapoo Woods Cooperative recommended the video. Mr. Flogstad said there are two video's, one video is promoting the industry, and the other is more about the process. He said the purpose of showing the videos is to open the discussion on the feasibility of replication of a bio-fuel pellet industry in the region. Mr. Flogstad said that Austria has a goal that by 2030, 30% of its energy needs will be met by renewable resources. After presentation of both videos, discussion occurred on the feasibility of a bio-fuel pellet industry in our region.

Commissioner Leys said that he understood that Austria has to import much of their natural gas from Russia, but that is not a problem in the U.S. Mr. Leys said the U.S. has an abundance of natural gas and that the bio-fuel industry could require taxpayer subsidies such as ethanol. He said U.S. taxpayers subsidize ethanol with billions of taxpayer dollars each year. Mr. Green said that a lot of natural gas is imported into the State and how does that affect our state. He questioned whether the bio fuel pellet industry is a way to improve the State's bottom line. There was then some discussion of the bio-fuel pellet industry increasing the cost of wood. Commissioner Leys said the U.S. is already importing wood chips from Brazil for the paper industry. Commissioner Leys added that already 20% of the corn in Iowa is going to ethanol production thereby reducing corn's impact on the food supply. Mr. Green said if a bio-fuel pellet industry is going to be established it has to be done in a sustainable manner. Commissioner Leys said you could put him down as a skeptic for replicating the bio-fuel pellet industry in our region. Commissioner Purdy brought up the integration and new enterprises being developed because of a bio-fuel pellet industry. He said that it's possible to develop other industries that would support the bio-fuel pellet industry. He said the bio-fuel pellet industry is something this group should look at but at a lower scale than Austria. Mr. Cronin mentioned a project in his county where a business was looking to move forward in finding funding to set up a biomass operation. The business has a source of biomass but needs funding to get a biomass operation going. Commissioner Schroeder said from his experience the biomass left over from logging operations is tremendous and it would be great to use some of that waste. There was some more discussion on whether tax incentives would be needed. Commissioner Christenson said we should explore this but right now there isn't a market, and that's needed. He added that a bio-fuel industry is also carbon neutral. Commissioner Kuhn said that slash or waste is needed and it provides needed nutrients for the forests. We can't take all of the slash. He said there are many federal forests where wood is rotting because no cutting is allowed. Commissioner Krachey said this could bring a market for some of the scrub trees etc. that are just left to lie.

Mr. Flogstad said the most practical use for pellets in the region is wood energy for home heating. He said in some statistics he's looked at show burning pellets costs about half of what LP gas costs. Mr. Flogstad said the market for wood pellets is probably home heating and getting people to convert from LP gas to burning pellets. Mr. Green mentioned the huge volumes of natural gas consumed by municipal wastewater treatment facilities and questioned whether there would be a way to harvest energy from that waste. Mr. Schlesselman discussed sustainable forestry practices used by Austria and said the Wisconsin DNR encourages sustainable management of forests and has several programs to help other Wisconsin forest owners. He mentioned sawmills and the tremendous amount of waste they produce. He said that biomass doesn't just have to mean wood, it can be wastepaper from landfills, paper/cardboard, crop residue etc. He said the production of biomass must be done in a sustainable manner. He added that the U.S. is much further behind in manufacturing stoves etc. than can handle ash content produced. Mr. Schlesselman said that corn cobs can also be pelletized and used for heating and energy. He said he

questions if such an industry could be profitable. He added that a study would help show this. There was also some discussion on the energy used for drying the wood if you can't dry it naturally and the downside of the transportation costs as it's estimated it takes one ton of pellets a year to heat your home. Commissioner Kuhn said information provided at a forestry conference he attended estimated a 4 mile maximum you could haul slash etc. to make it profitable.

**Decision on Resolution Authorizing Submission of a U.S. Department of Commerce-Economic Development Administration Technical Assistance Grant to Determine Feasibility of Biofuel Production and Use in the Kickapoo Valley**

Chairman Savage asked Mr. Law to present Resolution 8.10.2011-1 wherein the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission applies to the U.S. Department of Commerce-Economic Development Administration for a \$25,000 technical assistance grant that would be used to study the viability of biofuel production and use in the Kickapoo Valley. Mr. Law said a \$25,000 match is required and will most likely come from the Kickapoo Valley Reforestation fund. Mr. Law then reviewed the (draft) scope of work. Chairman Savage asked for a motion on the resolution and Commissioner Purdy made a motion to adopt Resolution 8.10.2011-1. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Murray and adopted. Chairman Savage asked for a vote on the motion with 18 commissioners voting yes, and 2 voting no. Commissioner Leys and Commissioner Ross voted no.

**Decision on Approval of Program and Funding Amendment to EDA 2011-2014 Planning Grant Regarding Renewable Energy Economic Opportunity Study**

Chairman Savage asked Mr. Law to present Resolution 8.10.2011-2 wherein the MRRPC would apply to the U.S. Department of Commerce-Economic Development Administration for funding to support a renewable energy study grant as a supplement to the 2011-2014 EDA Planning Grant. Mr. Law said the grant would be for \$30,000 over three years and would require a \$30,000 match. Mr. Law said a study on renewable energy in the region would be done as part of this grant. He added that everyone should have received a scope of work outlining the renewable energy economic opportunity study proposed. Chairman Savage asked for a motion on Resolution 8.10.2011-2. Commissioner Borreson made a motion to adopt Resolution 8.10.2011-2 and the motion was seconded by Commission Johnson. There was some discussion on where the local match would come from. Mr. Flogstad explained the match would come from MRRPC funds and would be spread over three years. The motion was then approved unanimously.

**Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee Meeting Report**

Mr. Law said the CEDS Committee met this a.m. to discuss the purpose of the CEDS. Mr. Law explained the CEDS has to be updated every five years and maintains communities, businesses and institutions eligibility for Federal Department of Commerce-Economic Development Administration (EDA) funding. The CEDS Committee looked at a draft list of the region's economic centers, assets, and organizations and added the following to the list: Fort McCoy, 190-194, hospitals/health care, other regional economic centers such as Rochester, Minnesota; Winona, Minnesota; and Eau Claire, Wisconsin as regional assets. The committee discussed economic driver clusters. At the next meeting the committee will discuss value added exports and import substitutions, economic distress of the region and economic development strategies for the region. Mr. Law said the CEDS has to be updated every 5 years.

Mr. Law reviewed a handout showing the region's economic driver industry clusters, the region's support and supplier clusters, and the regional economic development organization input system. Mr. Law said that the region's economic industry clusters have a ripple effect through the export of their goods and services and importing of capital. He said the support and supply industries such as wholesale trade, information, construction, transportation, health care etc. provide support to the economic driver industry clusters. Finally the regional economic development organization input systems that consists of education and training, innovation, capital markets, physical infrastructure, business, information infrastructure and quality of life support the other two sectors. Mr. Law said the CEDS committee discussed how to better market businesses in the region and were also focused on the current high unemployment and lower income levels. He said the purpose of the CEDS is to get input and welcomed any input that will assist in developing an economic development strategy for the region for the next five years. Mr. Flogstad said EDA wants the CEDS committee to be made up of primarily the private sector. Commissioner Leys said that as the MRRPC survey results indicated most people think manufacturing is the key to the development of the region's economy. Mr. Leys said manufacturing jobs usually pay wages that can support families.

### **Decision on Village of La Farge Economic and Recreation Development Plan Contract**

Mr. Fletcher said the Village of La Farge has asked the MRRPC to assist them with preparing an economic and development recreation plan. The Village received a Nuzum grant for this purpose and has asked the MRRPC to assist in the planning process. He explained the grant period would be from August 2011 through July 2012 and the grant amount is \$9,400. Chairman Savage asked for a motion to approve the La Farge Economic and Development Plan contract. Commissioner Johnson made a motion to approve the contract with the Village of La Farge; the motion was seconded by Commissioner Ehram and approved unanimously.

### **Decision on Motion to Accept Regional Comprehensive Plan Public Opinion Survey Report**

Mr. Flogstad said all Commissioners should have received a final bound report of the public opinion survey conducted as part of the MRRPC comprehensive planning process. He said nothing has changed since the draft handed out at the June meeting. Mr. Flogstad said this is just one way the MRRPC will be getting public input for the comprehensive plan. Mr. Flogstad asked for a motion accepting the Regional Comprehensive Plan Public Opinion Survey Report. Commissioner Leys said he felt the survey was very well done. Commissioner Leys made a motion to accept the Regional Comprehensive Plan Public Opinion Survey Report. Commissioner Purdy seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved.

### **Update on Status of Link Wisconsin High Speed Internet-Broadband Planning Project**

Mr. Law said LinkWISCONSIN is a statewide initiative to promote the availability of broadband Internet access. He said this project began with the mapping of where broadband is currently available and not available, and why not. He said the current phase involves working with leaders throughout the state to develop a plan for establishing greater access to broadband. He said the statewide effort is divided into 9 regions, and the MRRPC is mostly within Region 6. He said the MRRPC has been volunteered as conveners for that region and are seeking public comments on major broadband issues in the region. Commissioner Purdy asked what the plan was for. Mr. Law said it's an effort to raise awareness of broadband and what it can do. Commissioner Purdy said Pierce County has big gaps in service for broadband. Mr. Flogstad suggested that Commissioner Purdy go to the LinkWISCONSIN website under Region 3 and enter his comments regarding service in Pierce County. Mr. Flogstad said the LinkWISCONSIN website is a very comprehensive and useful site. Commissioner Schlesselman reported that Buffalo County also has big gaps in their service and he hopes there will be more options available as a result of this project.

### **Grant Award from the Department of Defense for a Joint Land use Study for Local Governments Surrounding Fort Mc Coy**

Mr. Law said MRRPC staff was awarded grant award in July to prepare a Joint Land Use Study (JLUS) for Fort Mc Coy. He said the grant will be used to prepare a study to help identify existing and future land use and social conflicts that may arise between the base and communities surrounding the Fort. He said the MRRPC has one year to complete the study and the first step is to organize a policy committee. He said invites will be sent out to leaders of municipalities abutting Fort McCoy, Fort McCoy officials and appropriate state agencies. He said once a committee is formed duties will be assigned to technical groups to analyze data and come up with a list of recommendations. The funding of the grant was discussed. Mr. Law said the grant is for \$90,000 and requires a \$10,000 match from the MRRPC. Mr. Flogstad said Xcel energy has committed to contribute \$3,000 of the required match. Commissioners concurred that a plan such as this just helps bolster the case for the importance of Fort McCoy. Mr. Law said it's important to plan for the future to head off conflicts that can arise between the Fort and surrounding municipalities. Commissioner Kuhn said nothing is a guarantee, but these planning efforts all help.

Commissioner Johnson said she recently heard an excellent presentation made by a colonel at the Fort. Ms. Burke said it may be beneficial for MRRPC commissioners to hear the presentation and possibly we could get someone from Fort McCoy to speak at an upcoming bimonthly meeting.

### **Old Business and New Business**

Chairman Savage asked if there was any old business. Hearing none, Chairman Savage then asked if there was any new business. Mr. Bonifas said that Pepin County was able to use survey results from the MRRPC's Public Opinion Survey for their comprehensive planning process. He explained this saved Pepin County some money. Commissioner Murray provided a report on the status of George Dupre who has had health problems.

Commissioner Murray said there has been some dispute in Pepin County over some sand mines being developed. He said that the development of these sand mines means the hauling of sand 24 hours a day over town roads. He said mentioned a township

in the county that has no zoning and if that's the case there is really nothing the town can do to stop the development of sand mines. He said cases such as this really show the importance of zoning. Commissioner Purdy said that sand mining is currently a boon in the region and questioned if it's a problem or opportunity.

There was discussion on the development of sand mines in several MRRPC counties. Mr. Savage said himself, other Jackson County Commissioners and Mr. Flogstad were recently invited for a tour of a sand mining operation in Jackson County. He said the mine is projected to add 65 new jobs. Mr. Leys said this is one way to end some of our dependence on foreign oil but there are costs involved.

Commissioner Murray said that in Pepin County they are taking 390 ft. of sand off of a bluff. There was more discussion on sand mining and the development of new jobs, but also the costs of these jobs such as the cost to taxpayers through damaged roads, and also the mess that is sometimes left as a result of the mining efforts. Commissioner Smith said if anyone is really interested in what an area looks like after sand mining they should go west of Bloomer, Wisconsin and drive around, and then decide if you want sand mining in your back yard. Commissioner Schroeder indicated there is sand mining in Pierce County but it is underground. He said those underground mining operations provide good jobs. More discussion occurred on sand mining and the open pit mines that can be an eye sore to an area. Reclamation of the land was also discussed. Mr. Murray said often reclamation only guarantees the areas to be safe after the mining operations. Commissioner Savage mentioned a former iron mining operation in Jackson County, Wazee Lake, that has become a recreational asset in the County. Commissioner Leys said a key is to have good zoning and regulations. Commissioner Christenson said another thing to factor in is if the mine goes bankrupt.

Mr. Flogstad said the October bimonthly meeting would again begin at 10:30 to allow the CEDS Committee to meet from 9:00 to 10:15. The bimonthly meeting was then adjourned.

This is to certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the August 10, 2011, bimonthly meeting minutes approved on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of October 2011.

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Vicki Burke, Secretary-Treasurer