



**MISSISSIPPI RIVER
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION**
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**James Kuhn, Cashton, WI
Chairman**
**Margaret Baecker, Independence, 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 8, 2017
Americinn (formerly Best Western Riverfront Hotel), 1835 Rose Street, La Crosse, Wisconsin

Call to Order

Chairman Kuhn called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. and asked for the roll call. A quorum was present. The attendance roster is attached. There were several guests in attendance: Karrie Jackelen Representing Congressman Ron Kind, Tony Kurtz Representing Senator Ron Johnson, and Adam Kuhn, UW-La Crosse Intern

Minutes of December 14, 2016 Bimonthly Meeting

Chairman Kuhn asked for a motion on the December 14, 2016 bimonthly minutes. Commissioner Ehrsam made a motion to approve the December 14, 2016 meeting minutes and the motion was seconded by Commissioner Twidt. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments and hearing none, the minutes were unanimously approved.

Treasurer's Report

Secretary-Treasurer Burke gave the treasurers report. Ms. Burke said the November 30, 2016 balance in all MRRPC accounts was \$239,821.70 and the December 31, 2016 ending balance was \$211,696.89. She reported the beginning balance in January 2017 was \$211,696.89 and January 31, 2017 ending balance was \$291,264.74.

Ms. Burke said the Business Capital Fund (BCF) began with a November 30, 2016 balance of \$242,024.42. Activity from December 1, 2016 through January 31, 2017 included loan repayments of \$9,493.28 and interest earned of \$83.78 leaving a January 31, 2017 balance on hand of \$251,601.48. The BCF Sequester Account began with a December 1, 2016 balance of \$454,056.62. There was no activity in this account from December 1, 2016 to January 31, 2017 leaving a balance on hand of \$454,056.62.

Ms. Burke said the Business Capital Fund 2 began with a November 30, 2016 balance of \$35,841.56. Activity from December 1, 2016 through January 31, 2017 included loan repayments of \$1,480.00 and interest earned of \$12.44 leaving a January 31, 2017 balance of \$37,334.00. Ms. Burke said the Business Capital Fund 2 Sequester Account began with a November 30, 2016 balance of \$160,591.98. There was no activity in this account from December 1, 2016 to January 31, 2017 leaving a balance on hand of \$160,591.98.

Ms. Burke said the CMV Growth Development Fund began with a November 30, 2016 balance of \$49,540.58. Activity from December 1, 2016 through January 31, 2017 included loan repayments of \$934.16, interest earned of \$8.55, administrative expenses of \$726.34, and a bank fee of \$5.00 leaving a January 31, 2017 balance of \$49,751.95. Ms. Burke said the CMV Growth Development Fund Sequester Account began with a November 30, 2016 balance of \$104,052.88. Activity from December 1, 2016 through January 31, 2016 included interest earned of \$17.96 leaving a balance of \$104,070.84.

Providing Planning and Economic Development Services to Improve the Environment, Economy and Quality of Life!

***•Land Use Planning and Zoning Assistance •Transportation Planning •Economic Development Planning •Recreation Planning •Business Lending
•Grant Writing •Economic Data Dissemination •Assisting Local Interests in Responding to State, Federal and Private Programs •Advisory
Services on Planning and Development Issues •Coordinator for Programs and Activities •Advocate on Issues Affecting the Region***

The La Crosse County Economic Development Fund began with a November 30, 2016 balance of \$2,357.05. Activity from December 1, 2016 through January 31, 2017 included loan repayments of \$5,434.52, interest earned of \$0.89, and a bank fee refund of \$30.00 leaving a January 31, 2017 balance of \$7,822.46. Ms. Burke said the La Crosse County Economic Development Fund Sequester Account has been closed.

Chairman Kuhn asked for a motion to approve the treasurer's report as presented. Commissioner Boresson made a motion to approve the treasurer's report. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Nickelatti. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments and hearing none, the treasurer's report was unanimously approved.

Decision on MRRPC 2017 Budget

Mr. Flogstad reviewed the 2017 budget. He stated that revenue of \$381,824 is expected with expenses for 2017 totaling \$369,278. He stated that the unaudited receivables listed for 2016 are in excess of \$50,000 and the MRRPC will likely finish in the black in 2016 with revenues exceeding expenses by at least \$6,000. The 2017 budget shows county contributions of \$138,860 and that revenue is already coming in from the nine counties. He said the only two revenue sources for 2017 are two contracts with Mississippi River Parkway Commission. He also said the U.S. Department of Commerce- Economic Development Association (EDA) Planning Grant will be increased from about \$50,000 to \$70,000 a year. This is the first increase this grant has experienced in 30 years. Mr. Flogstad reviewed the expenses and highlighted the differences by explaining the difference in salaries due to the new Administrative Assistant working 5 days a week versus 4 and the \$0.50 an hour raise that was granted last year to all staff to maintain competitive with similar jobs in the region. Mr. Flogstad explained that the fringe benefits have gone down because a new employee selected a single health insurance plan versus a family health insurance plan that covered the previous employee. He stated copying costs are budgeted to increase, because of the need to make copies of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. Mr. Flogstad said that the office copier is getting older so he budgeted funding for replacing this in the event of it needing to be replaced. He also stated that salaries assume a 2% increase beginning July 1, 2017, but this actual amount would be determined at the April 2017 MRRPC Meeting. Commissioner Ross commented that leasing could be a good option for the aging copy machine and it might be a good opportunity to do a cost check before the current copier fails. Chairman Kuhn asked for a motion to approve the MRRPC 2017 Budget as presented. Commissioner Ehram made a motion to approve the 2017 Budget as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Twidt and was unanimously approved.

Report on Public Transit Feasibility Study Results on service from La Crosse County to Monroe and Trempealeau Counties

Mr. Fletcher reported on the feasibility study to expand SMRT bus services into Monroe and Trempealeau Counties. He said that grant funds were received by La Crosse County from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to conduct the study and the study was completed by MRRPC staff, La Crosse County staff, and La Crosse Area Planning Committee staff. The existing SMRT Bus system was used as a model for the study. The current SMRT Bus runs 5 days a week with each bus having a 26-passenger capacity, free Wi-Fi onboard, comfortable accommodations, bike racks, and are handicap accessible. The study used the same fare system, \$3.00 one way with the option of purchasing a 10-ride punch card which reduces the fare to \$2.50 one way, or a monthly pass for \$80 which reduces the fare to \$2.00 one way and each route included multiple stops. Mr. Fletcher said that the study began with employer and employee surveys being conducted. Financial incentives and those who commute 20 miles or more were found to be more likely to use the service. Surveys were also conducted at the Park-n-Ride in West Salem. Ashley Furniture in Arcadia has considered the option of obtaining their own buses but the liability would be too great. Mr. Fletcher said the potential routes would travel from La Crosse to Tomah and La Crosse to Arcadia making stops at all the major employers. He said that the study looked at those individuals commuting to and from work. The route time would be 60 minutes or less. The La Crosse to Tomah route would provide a 2-bus system with pickups in the morning, mid-day, and afternoon to provide all day service. The ridership estimates are based on employee numbers since they would provide a constant source of revenue. The study determined that the best ridership statistics would be 36-44 passengers and the more likely ridership statistics would be 20-28 passengers. Of the current SMRT Bus ridership, 55-60% use it for work. Mr. Fletcher said that the cost to run the SMRT Bus is \$48.50/hr. He stated the complete can be viewed on the MRRPC web site - mrrpc.com. and at lapc.org. The study breaks down the cost per minute, per hour, round trip, and the cost per day. The fare box revenue accounts for 10%. He said the budgeting goal for revenue is: 34% local match, 56% State Federal Grant, and 10% fare box. The local match would be \$106,280. Capital costs include \$100,000 per bus with a 20% local match and 80% from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. When the ridership-fare box revenue increases, the local match amount goes down. Mr. Fletcher said that the expanded SMRT Bus routes would need \$250,000 of donations from businesses and governments annually to run both the routes from La Crosse to Tomah and La Crosse to Arcadia. The study's findings are being presented to local businesses and the public.

Commissioner Nickelatti commented that the current SMRT route from Prairie du Chien to La Crosse has become very popular and positively received by students and employees.

Commissioner Urell commented that the SMRT Bus could help counties with tight budgets with programs like Med Share. Commissioner Cornell asked how successful is the current SMRT Bus. Mr. Fletcher said that the route begins at 7 am with people going in to work and some routes are almost reaching capacity. There has been an 8% increase in ridership without advertising. To get people interested in the SMRT Bus they are looking to implement a free ride Monday for those interested to try it.

Commissioner Schlesselman asked if there was any push back for the local match. Mr. Fletcher replied that there are several businesses that have contributed such as the hospitals, businesses, and municipalities. Commissioner Borreson asked about the cost of bus replacement. Mr. Fletcher replied that the WisDOT contributes 80% and once you are established with the grant you reapply every year and you are eligible for the same funding.

Decision on contract between City of Prairie du Chien and MRRPC for MRRPC to provide management services for Scenic Mississippi River Transit (SMRT) service serving parts of La Crosse, Vernon, and Crawford counties.

Mr. Fletcher discussed that the MRRPC has had an informal relationship with the City of Prairie du Chien where the MRRPC has been providing management services for the SMRT bus. The WisDOT is now requiring that the MRRPC formalize the agreement with a signed contract between the MRRPC and the City of Prairie du Chien. Commissioner Nickelatti made a motion to approve the contract between the MRRPC and the City of Prairie du Chien for the MRRPC to provide management services for the Scenic Mississippi River Transit service serving parts of La Crosse, Vernon, and Crawford counties. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Schroeder and was unanimously approved.

Decision on contract between the Wisconsin Mississippi River Parkway Commission and the MRRPC for the MRRPC to prepare a Commissioners' Handbook

Mr. Fletcher discussed that the Wisconsin Mississippi River Parkway Commission works to promote the river road. The updated handbook would include the rules, responsibilities, and information about the commission. Commissioner McMillan Urell made a motion to approve the contract between the Wisconsin Mississippi River Parkway Commission and the MRRPC for the MRRPC to prepare a Commissioners' Handbook. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ross and was unanimously approved.

Decision on contract between the Wisconsin Mississippi River Parkway Commission and the MRRPC for the MRRPC to update the Parkway Commission's Management Plan

Mr. Fletcher discussed that he serves on the technical committee for the Wisconsin Mississippi River Parkway Commission. He said it has been 20 years since the Wisconsin Mississippi River Parkway Commission has updated their plan. Updating the plan would include updating the plan facilities. Commissioner McMillan Urell made a motion to approve the contract between the Wisconsin Mississippi River Parkway Commission and the MRRPC for the MRRPC to update the Parkway Commission's Management Plan. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Folcey and was unanimously approved.

Status report and Commissioner Input on the 2017-2022 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

Mr. Flogstad discussed the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and how the committee was established from members of the commission with various areas of expertise. Mr. Flogstad explained that the CEDS is a joint effort of everyone on the commission and would like everyone to review the handouts and then share strengths and weaknesses of the region together. Commissioner Schlesselman shared that some weaknesses to be added included a declining population in rural communities, lack of workforce, and land conservation such as losing top soil in the Driftless Area due to topography. Commissioner Schroeder commented that erosion and suspended solids in rivers and streams are an issue. Commissioner Schlesselman stated that there were some good trends in the 1950s and the 1960s for soil conservation but that has changed. Commissioner Kuhn commented that agricultural practices have changed and that contour strip farming is not being used as consistently as it should be to conserve the topsoil. Commissioner Kraft commented that the disposing of liquid manure is an issue. Commissioner McMillan Urell commented that people are living longer and are no longer in the workforce. Tony Kurtz, Representing Senator Johnson, commented that the drug problem is a weakness that could be added.

Mr. Flogstad explained that the CEDS is a guide to grow the economy and is used by federal agencies because they want their funding to help implement regional economic development plans. Mr. Flogstad pointed out that the communities of Viola and Viroqua were able to score more points because their sewer projects addressed an economic need that was identified in a regional plan. The CEDS also assists communities with funding for industrial parks, business incubators, and revolving loan funds. Commissioner McMillan Urell said

the region could benefit from a sports complex. Commissioner Borreson commented that losing educated people from the area was an issue. He said it would be beneficial to offer financial incentives such as loan forgiveness, tax breaks, or tuition reductions to keep those educated workers. Commissioner Schroeder and Commissioner Jaekel commented that promoting a vocational education would provide great opportunities. Commissioner Ross commented that inviting journalists and other marketing concepts would benefit the region. Commissioner Kraft commented that Discover Wisconsin had done some great pieces on promoting Pepin County.

Old, Business, New Business and Adjourn

Chairman Kuhn asked if there was any old business. Hearing none Chairman Kuhn asked if there was any new business.

Hearing none, a motion was made to adjourn by Commissioner Twidt and seconded by Commissioner Schroeder. The motion was unanimously approved.

Vicki Burke, Secretary-Treasurer