



**MISSISSIPPI RIVER
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION**
1707 Main Street, Suite 435
La Crosse, WI 54601
Phone: (608) 785-9396
Email: plan@mrrpc.com
Website: mrrpc.com

*James Kuhn, Cashton, WI
Chairman*
*Margaret Baecker, Independence, WI
Vice Chairman*
*Vicki Burke, Onalaska, WI
Secretary & Treasurer*
*Dave Bonifas, La Crosse, WI
Director*

MINUTES
MISSISSIPPI RIVER REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION (MRRPC)
BIMONTHLY MEETING
10:00 a.m., December 9, 2020
AmericInn 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. There were several guests in attendance: Kelliann Blazek, Director of Office of Rural Prosperity, Greg Wavrunek, Representing Senator Tammy Baldwin, Roxie Anderson, Land Use Planner, Monroe County, Francis Schelfhout, WI DOT, Jenny Kuderer-Radcliffe Dairyland Power, Mark Tallman, WEDC. The attendance roster is attached.

Minutes of October 14, 2020 Bimonthly Meeting

Chairman Kuhn asked for a motion on the October 14, 2020 bimonthly meeting minutes. Commissioner Twidt made a motion to approve the October 14, 2020 bimonthly meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Borreson. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments and hearing none, the minutes were unanimously approved.

Treasurer's Report

Secretary/Treasurer Burke reported that the September 30, 2020 balance in all accounts was \$415,133.05 and the October 31, 2020 ending balance was \$403,198.81. She reported the beginning balance November 1, 2020 was \$403,198.81 and November 30, 2020 ending balance was \$376,477.41. Commissioner Borreson made a motion to approve the treasurer's report as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Vold. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments hearing none the Treasurer's Report was unanimously approved.

Presentation by Kelliann Blazek, Director, Office of Rural Prosperity.

Kelliann Blazek, Director of the Office of Rural Prosperity, a new office created within WEDC, gave a presentation about the initiatives that are being implemented to ensure rural communities are prosperous and maintain a good quality of life for its residents. She discussed how the Office of Rural Prosperity partners with local governments to address issues such as broadband expansion, supporting outdoor recreation opportunities in rural areas, childcare availability, and workforce development. She said that a Blue Ribbon Commission has been formed and its priorities have changed pre and post the COVID-19 Pandemic. She said that the priorities post COVID include broadband expansion, childcare, workforce housing and senior housing, and rural leadership development (www.wedc.org/rural-prosperity).

Update on CARES Act Supplemental Funding.

- a) MRRPC Supplemental Funding - Mr. Bonifas reported that the CARES Act Supplemental Funding for \$400,000 is being used to upgrade the MRRPC website, small business webinars assistance, purchasing a COVID impact report from EMSI to analyze job loss and job creation trends after COVID, purchased equipment for staff to accommodate Zoom meetings and to work from home, purchased additional mapping software to be able to do more business analysis work, and a Zoom license to be able to host meetings. He said that grant funds will also be used for staff time to update the pandemic portion of our member counties' Hazard Mitigation Plans, and staff time to assist communities and counties with grant writing. Commissioner Borreson asked when the updates for the Hazard Mitigation Programs would begin. Mr. Bonifas responded that the counties will be contacted in 2021 and it will begin in the summer of 2021 for those plans.

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- b) MRRPC RLF Funding - Mr. Bonifas reported that the MRRPC had been awarded a \$1,050,000 to create a CARES Act Revolving Loan Fund to assist businesses in all of our member counties. He said that for the first 2 years EDA has reduced three requirements: interest rates will be at 1%, a bank turn down letter is not required, and the leveraging requirement has been waived. Mr. Bonifas said that there has been some interest, but most businesses are trying to apply for any available grant money before taking out a loan. He said that he has been in contact with other neighboring Regional Planning Commissions and is in the process of developing a marketing plan.

CARES Act Supplemental Funding Selection of Consultant to perform website upgrade and Small Business Website Assistance.

Mr. Bonifas reported that the Executive Committee met today before the commission's bimonthly meeting and the committee decided on a consultant for the website upgrade. There were three responses to the RFPs and the MRRPC staff reviewed the submitted proposals and the top two consultants were interviewed by staff. The Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at UW-La Crosse was also consulted since they will be working closely with the website consultants to assist small businesses. After the interviews, it was decided that the two consultants were very capable but one consultant, DigiSage, stood out due to their past work with the SBDC and helping small businesses. He said that at the Executive Meeting before the commission meeting the staff recommended DigiSage to do the website upgrade and provide Small Business Website assistance and the Executive Committee approved them as the consultant.

Update on CARES Act Supplemental Funding RFPs.

- a) SMRT Bus Marketing Plan - Mr. Gollnik reported that he had spoken with Charlie Handy, the La Crosse County Planner, and Peter Fletcher, the Executive Director, of the La Crosse Area MPO to create an RFP for a marketing plan for the SMRT Bus. He said the RFP for the marketing plan will be released in January of 2021 and will allow 4 to 6 weeks for firms to send in their proposals. He said that with the marketing plan they are looking to increase ridership and form more partnership and sponsorship opportunities.
- b) Location based data acquisition project – Mr. Gollnik reported that a consultant has been selected. He said that areas across the region will be geofenced meaning they will take an area and measure resident and visitor activity. He said that data will be reviewed pre and post COVID. Some examples of the datasets will include activity in the downtown business areas, recreational facilities, and seasonal travel. He said that these datasets will be updated regularly for the length of the contract and will be available to our member counties. He said that this information will be used for economic development analysis. He said that Cambridge Systematics Incorporated was the firm that was selected.

BUILD Grant.

Mr. Gollnik reported that we were notified in September that we were awarded a BUILD Grant for \$140,000. He said that he has been attending webinars and has been working with the WisDOT FHWA administrator about how to procure the funds and the process for administering the grant. He said that it is more complex on the federal side. The grant proposal will include a consultant and work done by the commission. Commissioner Borreson asked about the focus of the BUILD Grant. Mr. Gollnik responded by saying that the grant will focus on analyzing freight flows and freight traffic in and out of the region and where growth opportunities would be as well as including issues and opportunities for the region. He said that the plan would analyze manufacturing and industry clusters and value-added services and ways to recruit new businesses.

Update of the EDA grant to fund economic recovery planning for the communities of Ontario, La Farge, Viola, and Readstown with MRRPC serving as the applicant and grant administrator.

Mr. Bonifas reported that the grant is progressing, and each community is at a different stage in the process. The Village of Viola is preparing for a public hearing for their draft plan and potential sites have been identified where the village can move. The Village of La Farge is a month behind due to the meeting schedules and they will have their draft plan completed within two months ready to present to the public. The Village of Ontario is in a unique situation due to previous work being incorporated into the plan. They have sites selected to move and they have been approved. The Village of Readstown has had a setback due to their village hall being shut down for the month of December because of COVID issues. They are working on hosting public listening sessions online but their large senior population is not comfortable with the technology so they are waiting until their village hall will be able to be open again. He said that all the plans will be completed by December 31, 2021. He said that the villages are identifying where to move their businesses and residential areas and how they will be able to fund the costs and obtain potential grants. He said that the Villages of La Farge and Viola are looking at levies as a potential way to reduce flooding in their villages and other options are being explored.

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Update on the City of Westby Industrial Park EDA grant administration.

Ms. Nicewander reported that the EDA grant awarded in April for the expansion of the City of Westby's Industrial Park was tied into flood recovery and resiliency and is progressing ahead of schedule. Since the last meeting, the engineers have submitted the engineering plat and it has been approved by WI DOT. After the plat was approved by WI DOT, it was sent to the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA) for approval and was approved last week. She said that the next step will be for the project to go to bid. She said that they will be working closely with EDA during the bid process to make sure EDA's guidelines are followed.

Update on EDA application for the relocation of La Farge's electrical substation.

Mr. Gollnik reported that this was the grant to assist the Village of La Farge with relocating their substation due to the flooding of 2018. He said that there have been some setbacks since the last commission meeting 1) EDA said that the grant funds that were targeted have all been allocated and are no longer available 2) there are other programs that the village can apply for, but the engineering portion of the application is more rigorous, and a consultant will need to be hired. Mr. Bonifas added that at the beginning of this process EDA said the 2018 disaster funds that were targeted were available but have since been allocated. He said that the programs that are currently available include a 50/50 match of funds in contrast to the disaster funds which were an 80/20 match. He said that we are trying to use the flooding situation and disaster declaration with the economic conditions in the Village of La Farge to try for a better match ratio.

Update on the Town of Campbell and Town of Holland Comprehensive Plan Updates.

- a) Town of Campbell Comprehensive Plan - Ms. Nicewander reported that comprehensive plans are updated every 10 years and allows municipalities to develop and create a vision of what the residents would like their municipality to become in the future through the different elements for example land use, the economy, transportation, agriculture, natural resources, and housing. She said that these elements have been updated for the plan and the Town of Campbell has created some specific goals that they would like to achieve within the next 5 to 10 years which include the area near the Kwik Trip on French Island to fill in this area to create a canoe and boat launch and to make some land use changes from commercial to residential. She said that meetings have been virtual and online surveys have been used.
- b) Town of Holland Comprehensive Plan – Ms. Nicewander reported that the Town of Holland has been meeting in person for their Planning Commission meetings. She said that there has been some very good discussion at their meetings. She said that they have a boundary agreement with the Village of Holmen which moved their commercial and business district into Holmen. She said that the town is working on balancing an increase in housing and maintain a rural environment.

Update on the Town of Hamilton Comprehensive Plan Updates.

Mr. Gollnik reported that we have just recently signed a contract with the Town of Hamilton. He said that the plan elements are being updated and the Town of Hamilton is exploring some minor land use changes to create more opportunities for commercial development. He said that he had met with the Planning Commission and developed a flier to be sent out in the town residents' utility bills this week with information about a survey and websites and an overview of the purpose of the plan update. The next meeting of the planning commission will be on December 17. He said that they are targeting May or June for completion of the plan update.

Outdoor Recreation Plan Updates.

- a) Vernon County Outdoor Recreation Plan - Ms. Nicewander reported that Outdoor Recreation Plans are updated every 5 years. She said that she has been working with the land use department, tourism, and outdoor recreation department. She said that they are making the plan a marketing plan combined with an outdoor recreation plan for the community in hopes that it would attract more readers. She said that there will be an emphasis of what you can do at the parks during different times of the year such as hunting and fishing and easement access with links to online resources that they have been developing. She said that surveys have been collected and 5-year goals are being created for the parks.

Hazard Mitigation Plan Updates.

Ms. Nicewander reported that both of the Hazard Mitigation Plans for Jackson County and La Crosse County have been approved by Wisconsin Emergency Management (WEM). She said that next step is for the plan to be approved by the counties and then by each of the counties' municipalities. Once the plan has been approved by the counties and all the municipalities, it will go into effect and it will allow the municipalities to apply for grants. She said that the COVID-19 Pandemic was going on during the writing process which allowed them to add additional pandemic information into the plan. She said that La Crosse County also added some information about high hazard dams in their plan.

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Buffalo County Hazard Mitigation Plan Update.

Mr. Bonifas reported that the State of Wisconsin applies for money from FEMA every year for projects in the state. He said that we then apply for the funds from the state and then the state selects which projects that they would like to see completed. The Buffalo County Hazard Mitigation plan has been approved. He said that we are still waiting for approval from FEMA to begin the project.

Reports from Commissioners.

Commissioners shared some pressing issues in their counties. **Buffalo County:** Broadband expansion, not enough funding for roads at the town level. **Crawford County:** Lack of funding. **Jackson County:** Small businesses are struggling. Workforce and homeschooling are issues. Black River Falls created a microloan fund and have made interest free microloans to businesses for five years. Expansion of municipal utilities and residential housing and assisted living facility being built due to the low interest rates. **Monroe County:** Rolling Hills facility. **Pierce County:** Using RLF CDBG money for road and bridges project and broadband expansion. **Trempealeau County:** COVID has impacted discussion about economic development and using highway crews to take out brush and open ditches. The health department is under pressure. **Vernon County:** Expanding Vernon Manor to include a 32 unit assisted living facility. Working on road improvements and broadband expansion.

New Business and Adjourn

Chairman Kuhn asked if there was any new business. Commissioner Burke extended a welcome to the new La Crosse County Commissioner. A motion was made to adjourn by Commissioner Twidt and seconded by Commissioner Schroeder. The motion was unanimously approved.

Vicki Burke, Secretary/ Treasurer

Date

MRRPC Bimonthly Meeting Attendees	
Name	Representing
Del Twidt	Buffalo County
Mary Anne McMillan Urell	Buffalo County
Dennis Pelock	Crawford County
Gerald Krachey	Crawford County
James Czajkowski	Crawford County
Brad Chown	Jackson County
Vicki Burke	La Crosse County
Sharon Hampson	La Crosse County
James Kuhn	Monroe County
Cedric Schnitzler	Monroe County
Sharon Folcey	Monroe County
Richard Purdy	Pierce County
Bill Schroeder	Pierce County
Ernest Vold	Trempealeau County
Phillip Borreson	Trempealeau County
Jo Ann Nickelatti	Vernon County
Nancy Jaekel	Vernon County
Dave Bonifas	MRRPC Staff
Bob Gollnik	MRRPC Staff
Abbey Nicewander	MRRPC Staff
Sarah Ofte	MRRPC Staff
Kelliann Blazek	Rural Prosperity
Greg Wavrunek	Representing Senior Tammy Baldwin
Roxie Anderson	Monroe County Land Use Planner
Francis Schelfhout	WI DOT
Jenny Kuderer-Radcliffe	Dairyland Power
Mark Tallman	WEDC