



**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*
*Dave Bonifas, La Crosse, WI
Director*

MINUTES
MISSISSIPPI RIVER REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION (MRRPC)
BIMONTHLY MEETING
10:00 a.m., February 10, 2021
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: Tessa Conroy, Economic Development Specialist – UW Madison Economic Development University Center, Peter Fletcher, Executive Director La Crosse Area MPO, Jackie Eastwood, Transportation Planner La Crosse Area MPO, Greg Wavrunek, Representing Senator Tammy Baldwin, Senator Brad Pfaff, Representative Loren Oldenburg, Senator Patrick Testin, and Jenny Kuderer-Radcliffe Dairyland Power. The attendance roster is attached.

Minutes of December 9, 2020 Bimonthly Meeting

Chairman Kuhn asked for a motion on the December 9, 2020 bimonthly meeting minutes. Commissioner Twidt made a motion to approve the December 9, 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

Mr. Bonifas reported that the November 30, 2020 balance in all accounts was \$376,477.41 and the December 31, 2021 ending balance was \$337,969.45. He reported the beginning balance January 1, 2021 was \$337,969.45 and January 31, 2021 ending balance was \$437,869.93. Secretary/Treasurer Burke joined the meeting at 10:15 am and reported that she had reconciled all accounts. Commissioner Twidt made a motion to approve the treasurer's report as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Carney. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments hearing none the Treasurer's Report was unanimously approved.

Presentation by Tessa Conroy, Economic Development Specialist, UW Madison Economic Development University Center, Community Development Institute.

Tessa Conroy, Economic Development Specialist of the UW Madison Economic Development University Center, Community Development Institute gave a presentation about the impacts of COVID-19 shutdown policies, working from home, and broadband impacts.

Decision on 2021 Budget.

Mr. Bonifas reviewed the 2021 budget. He reviewed the revenue sources that total \$408,230 and noted a new contract for revising the Buffalo County All Hazard Mitigation Plan. Expenditures are budgeted for \$408,230. He also stated that salaries assume a 2% increase beginning July 1, 2021, but this actual amount would be determined at the April 2021 MRRPC Meeting. Chairman Kuhn asked for a motion to approve the MRRPC 2021 Budget as presented. Commissioner Burke made a motion to approve the 2021 MRRPC Budget as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Pelock. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments and hearing none the motion was unanimously approved.

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Decision on contract for Buffalo County Hazard Mitigation Plan update.

Mr. Bonifas reported that the commission submitted a grant application for Buffalo County to update their Hazard Mitigation Plan in 2019 to FEMA and Wisconsin Emergency Management (WEM). He said that the application process was delayed, and the application has finally been approved. He said that the total grant amount is \$39,285.64 and is a 75% grant with a 25% match. He said that the commission and the county absorb the 25% match when working on the grant. The commission's work on the grant would not exceed \$29,464. He said that the Multi-Hazards Mitigation Plan draft would be submitted to Wisconsin Emergency Management by February 1, 2022 and the final plan will be completed and approved by FEMA by December 31, 2022. Between the Draft plan and the final approval with FEMA, the plan is reviewed. Chairman Kuhn asked for a motion to approve the contract for the Buffalo County Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan Update. Commissioner Twidt made a motion to approve the contract between the MRRPC and Buffalo County to complete the update to the Buffalo County Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Carney. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments and hearing none the motion was unanimously approved.

Decision on contract for T. Farmington Comprehensive Plan update.

Mr. Bonifas reported that the Town of Farmington has contacted the commission to update its Comprehensive Plan. He said that the cost of the plan would be \$12,000 with \$6,000 from the Town and \$6,000 being matched by the Commission. Commissioner Burke made a motion to approve the contract between the Town of Farmington and the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission to complete the update to the Town of Farmington's Comprehensive Plan. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Borreson. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments and hearing none the motion was unanimously approved.

CARES Act Supplemental Funding Website upgrade and Small Business Website Assistance.

Mr. Bonifas reported that meetings have been held with the Website consultant to discuss the MRRPC website content, design, and timeline. He said that once the content has been decided the actual implementation would be within two months. Mr. Bonifas also reported that he is working with the consultants and the Small Business Development Center to develop content for webinars and presentations to assist small businesses in each of our member counties. He said that the initial meeting has taken place and another meeting is planned. The ideas from those meetings will be discussed with the consultant to create the content for the webinars and presentations.

CARES Act Supplemental Funding – Location based data acquisition project.

Mr. Gollnik reported that at the last bimonthly meeting the firm Cambridge Analytics was selected to provide Location Based Data Acquisition services to analyze cellphone data pre COVID-19 and during the pandemic to assist in economic development in the region. He reported that he and Abbey Nicewander have met with the Cambridge Analytics consultants to discuss analysis areas and zones. He said that 40 areas have been targeted within the nine-county region representing a mix of different activity areas for example, downtowns, recreational areas, universities, and major areas where there is a lot of movement of people to analyze how things have changed due to the COVID-19 restrictions. He is anticipating that by the next bimonthly meeting there will be some preliminary data to present.

SMRT Bus update.

Mr. Gollnik reported that the SMRT Bus marketing plan funded through the CARES Act was moving forward. He said that requests for proposals have been sent out to a combination of local area marketing firms and to firms recommended by the National Public Transportation Association within the last few days. He said that the marketing plan will help identify new ridership and how to build local partnerships with local transit associations and authorities and how to complement their services. He said that six weeks was given for those firms to return their proposals. He said that the SMRT Bus ridership was impacted by COVID and showed a graph where there were significant impacts during April and May and then ridership begins to increase and has plateaued. He said that the riders working at Gundersen, Mayo, and Vernon Memorial Hospital have helped to keep the ridership steady. He said that with Western Technical College moving towards in person instruction again ridership could increase.

BUILD Grant

Mr. Gollnik reported that the BUILD Grant was a proposal that was applied for and awarded by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in the fall. He said that he is coordinating with FHWA and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to fine tune the work plan for the grant and get the agreements in place with FHWA to create a Request for Proposal to work with a consultant. He said that the grant is to create a regional freight strategy plan.

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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 project is moving along well and two communities, the Village of Viola and the Village of La Farge have adopted their plans. He said these plans identify relocation sites for businesses and residential housing out of the flood plain as well as identifying funding sources of how to pay for this relocation and which agencies to work with for the move. He said that the Village of Ontario has a draft plan in place and will be adopting their plan soon. The Village of Readstown is a little behind the others due to their village office being shut down due to COVID-19. They were waiting to be able to meet in person since their demographic has more elderly people who are not as comfortable meeting virtually. He said that all leftover money from their share of the grant can be used to begin the implementation of their plan for all non-construction items. The deadline for the grant is December 31, 2021 and the villages are in a good position to complete their plans well before the deadline.

CARES Act Supplemental Funding – RLF

Mr. Bonifas reported that we were awarded \$1,050,000 of additional revolving loan fund money from EDA to lend out to assist small businesses. The loans are in the \$10,000 to \$50,000 range with a 1% interest rate. He said that according to our plan submitted to EDA we could loan out up to \$300,000 per loan. He said that we have received our first application and have approved our first loan in La Crosse County for \$50,000 to a small business. He said that this fund is a little different from our other funds since we do not need a bank turn down letter and our other funds are gap financing requiring participation with a bank, a 2:1 private to public funding, and the lowest interest rate is 75% of the prime rate. He said that with the new CARES Act RLF three stipulations were eased for the first two years. He said that we can decide on any interest rate that we want and 1% was decided, the leveraging requirement and the bank turn down letter has been removed until June 30, 2022. After July 1, 2022, the three stipulations that were eased will go back into effect.

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

Ms. Nicewander reported that the City of Westby has submitted their engineering reports and bid documents that need to go to EDA before it goes to bid. The City of Westby was hoping the bid documents would be able to be sent out by January 27, 2021 but EDA is still reviewing the documents. She said that EDA is a little backlogged in their legal department where they are reviewing the documents. She said that we are in a holding pattern until EDA approves the bid documents that they are reviewing.

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

Ms. Nicewander reported that both the Town of Campbell and the Town of Holland have a draft plan completed. She said that both towns have reviewed the plans and have submitted edits for their individual plans. She said that now the towns are working on scheduling their open house meetings. The Town of Campbell has scheduled their first virtual open house meeting and the Town of Holland is also doing an in person and virtual open house meeting with their town hall open during the week for people to look at the exhibit and make comments and then an in person planning commission meeting is planned where residents will be able to ask questions. She said that at the end of March both towns will have completed the open house portion of the plan and the plans will then move on to the board for approval. Mr. Bonifas added that the Town of Campbell used the survey results for their comprehensive plan to discuss with the transportation department of the county to work on a project with bike trails and walking paths within the town.

Update on the Town of Hamilton Comprehensive Plan Updates.

Mr. Gollnik reported that there have been two meetings with the town's Planning Commission and paper surveys have been sent out. He said that an online survey will be opening up soon. The town's planning commission has approved the outline of the plan with some slight land use changes and inventory changes.

Outdoor Recreation Plan Updates for Vernon County and Buffalo County.

Vernon County Outdoor Recreation Plan - Ms. Nicewander reported that Vernon County is in its final stages of updating their Outdoor Recreation Plan. She said that they have made some minor adjustments to their goals that they would like to achieve. She said that they are looking to have the plan approved by the board before the next year's DNR grants are due in May. Buffalo County - She said that Buffalo County is looking to tie their Land and Water Plan into their Outdoor Recreation Plan update. She said that we are not updating the plan, but she said that she is attending some of their meetings to go over the update with them.

Hazard Mitigation Plan Updates.

Ms. Nicewander reported the Jackson County board adopted their Hazard Mitigation Plan and the plan is now going to the municipalities for adoption. She said that the Hazard Mitigation Plan for La Crosse County is going to the next board meeting for approval and once it is approved it will be sent to the municipalities for adoption.

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Reports from Commissioners.

Chairman Kuhn asked if any representatives would like to share any comments. Senator Pfaff thanked the commission for the opportunity to introduce himself. Gregg Wavrunek, representing Senator Baldwin, said that Senator Baldwin will be on the appropriations committee and information will be on her website to gather input. He also said that the American Rescue Plan is moving through the Senate.

Commissioners shared some pressing issues in their counties. **Trempealeau County:** The fracking plants have really slowed down and many jobs have been lost. This has also impacted schools negatively. **La Crosse County:** La Crosse County is seeking a CDBG Housing Grant along with Monroe, Vernon, and Crawford Counties to help keep people in their homes. La Crosse County is also giving \$100,000 to a homeless program and is also working on a preschool childcare project to help families with childcare.

New Business and Adjourn

Chairman Kuhn asked if there was any new business. 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
John Schlesselman	Buffalo County
Dennis Pelock	Crawford County
Gerald Krachey	Crawford County
James Czajkowski	Crawford County
Brad Chown	Jackson County
Ron Carney	Jackson County
Vicki Burke	La Crosse County
Sharon Hampson	La Crosse County
Robin Schmidt	La Crosse County
James Kuhn	Monroe County
Cedric Schnitzler	Monroe County
Sharon Folcey	Monroe County
Richard Purdy	Pierce County
Bill Schroeder	Pierce County
Phillip Borreson	Trempealeau County
Margaret Baecker	Trempealeau County
Nancy Jaekel	Vernon County
Dave Bonifas	MRRPC Staff
Bob Gollnik	MRRPC Staff
Abbey Nicewander	MRRPC Staff
Sarah Ofte	MRRPC Staff
Brad Pfaff	WI State Senator
Greg Wavrunek	Representing Senior Tammy Baldwin
Jackie Eastwood	Transportation Planner, La Crosse MPO
Peter Fletcher	Director, La Crosse MPO
Jenny Kuderer-Radcliffe	Dairyland Power
Loren Oldenburg	WI Assemblyman
Patrick Testin	WI State Senator
Tessa Conroy	UW-Madison Economic Development Specialist