



Providing planning and economic development services to improve the region's environment, economy and quality of life.

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission
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La Crosse, WI 54601

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ANNUAL REPORT

JUNE 1, 2020 - MAY 31, 2021

MISSISSIPPI RIVER REGIONAL
PLANNING COMMISSION



CONTACT US

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The Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission would like to thank the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, Wisconsin Department of Administration, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, The Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce - Economic Development Administration, Wisconsin Emergency Management, Federal Emergency Management Agency, and most of all the County Boards of Supervisors of Buffalo, Crawford, Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, Pepin, Pierce, Trempealeau and Vernon for their cooperation and involvement. The combined resources of these local, state, and federal government partners provide the funding that makes the activities of the MRRPC possible.

9 COUNTIES

BUFFALO
CRAWFORD
JACKSON
LA CROSSE
MONROE
PEPIN
PIERCE
TREMPEALEAU
VERNON



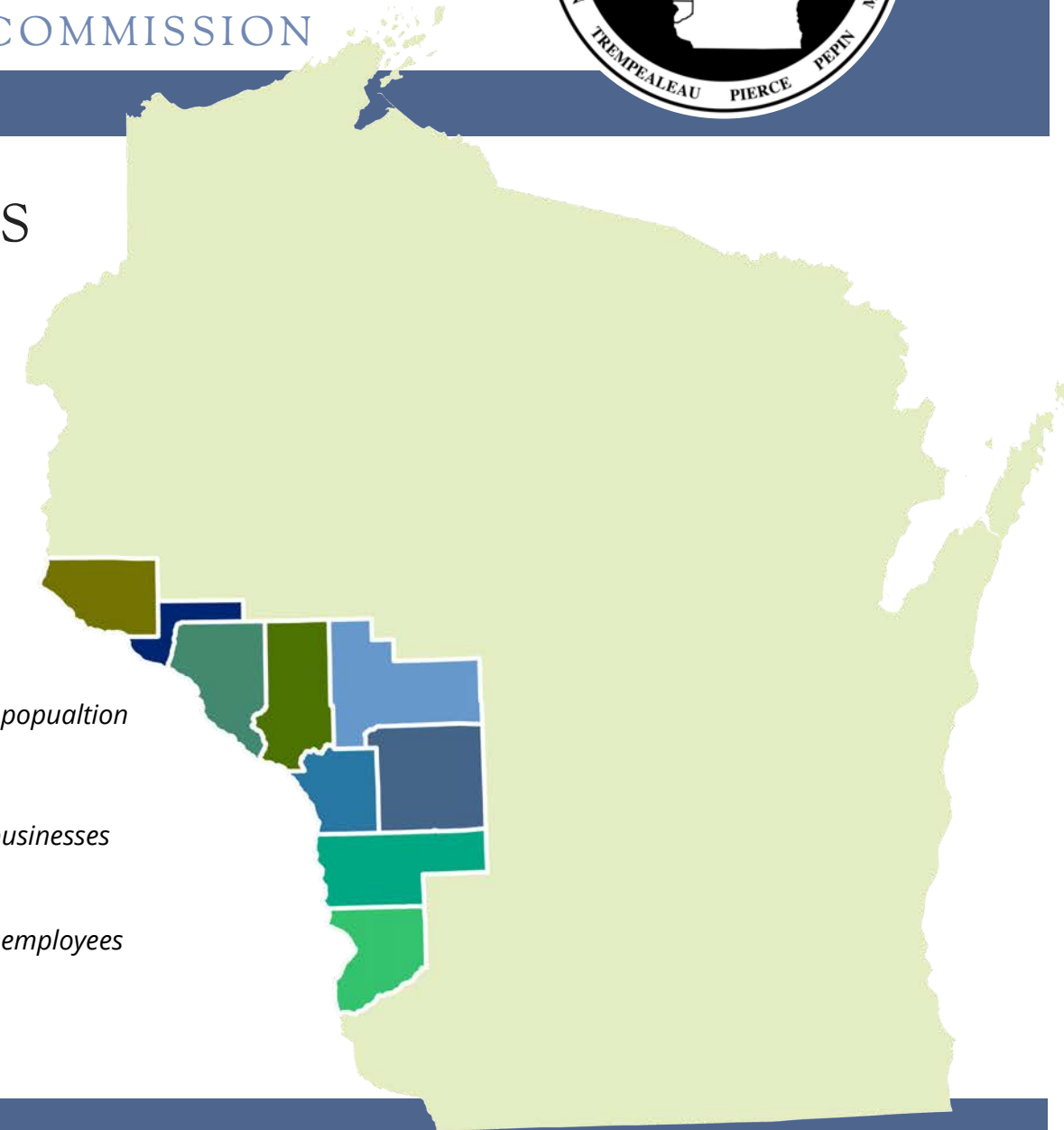
329,994 total population



12,692 total businesses



156,115 total employees



ABOUT US

The Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission (MRRPC) is a Commission of nine counties located along the Mississippi River in western Wisconsin. The Commission was organized in 1964 under Wisconsin State Statutes to plan for the physical, social, and economic development of the region. MRRPC is a multi-service entity that delivers a variety of federal, state, and local programs. Similar to a municipality, MRRPC is a public entity providing services to member local government units in western Wisconsin.



SERVICES



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Comprehensive Planning
Hazard Mitigation Planning
Land Use Planning
Outdoor Recreation Planning
Farmland Preservation Planning
Zoning Assistance
Housing Studies/Reports



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Comprehensive Economic
Development Strategy (CEDS)
Revolving Loan Funds
Disaster Recovery Microloans
Grant Writing and Administration
Special Reports



TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Regional Transportation Planning
Safe Routes to School Planning
Corridor Planning
Bicycle and Pedestrian Facility
Planning
Freight Planning
Transportation & Economic
Development



MAPPING AND DATA SERVICES

Custom Map Design
Interactive Maps and Applications
EMSI Developer Assistance
Location Based Data Services
Land Use Data

COMMISSIONERS

A group of commissioners oversees the activities of Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission. The Commission is made up of three commissioners from each member county that are a) appointed by the county board, b) appointed by the Governor from a list of persons nominated by the county board, and c) selected by the Governor.

Buffalo County
Mary Anne McMillan Urell
Del Twidt
John Schlesselman

Pepin County
John Andrews
Chris Kees Winkler
James Kraft

Crawford County
Dennis Pelock
Gerald Krachey
Vacant

Pierce County
Richard Purdy
William Schroeder
Greg Place

Jackson County
Ron Carney
Brad Chown
Vacant

Trempealeau County
Margaret Baecker
Ernest Vold
Phillip Borreson

La Crosse County
Vicki Burke
Sharon Hampson
Robin Schmidt

Vernon County
Herb Cornell
Jo Ann Nickelatti
Nancy Jaekel

Monroe County
Sharon Folcey
James Kuhn
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REVOLVING LOAN FUNDS

MRRPC ACTIVE LOANS 2020-2021



REVOLVING LOAN FUNDS	FUND BALANCE AS OF APRIL 30, 2021 (Total Cash and Receivables, and Other Assets)	AVAILABLE CASH BALANCE AS OF APRIL 30, 2021 (Net of Closed Loans not yet Funded and Committed Loans)
Business Capital Fund I	\$429,354.04	\$81,770.15
Business Capital Fund II	\$246,578.14	\$80,960.05
CMV Growth Development Fund	\$242,637.40	\$109,255.40
La Crosse County Business Fund	\$169,954.59	\$87,377.53
CARES Act RLF	\$1,050,000.00	\$925,000.00
TOTALS	\$1,213,524.17	\$1,284,363.13

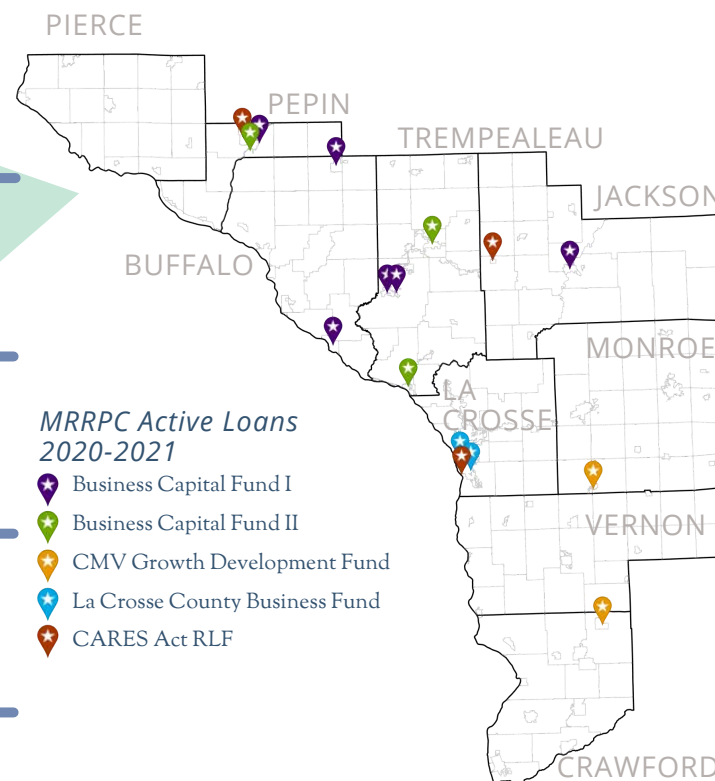
Since 1990

88 LOANS MADE TO BUSINESSES

734 JOBS CREATED OR RETAINED

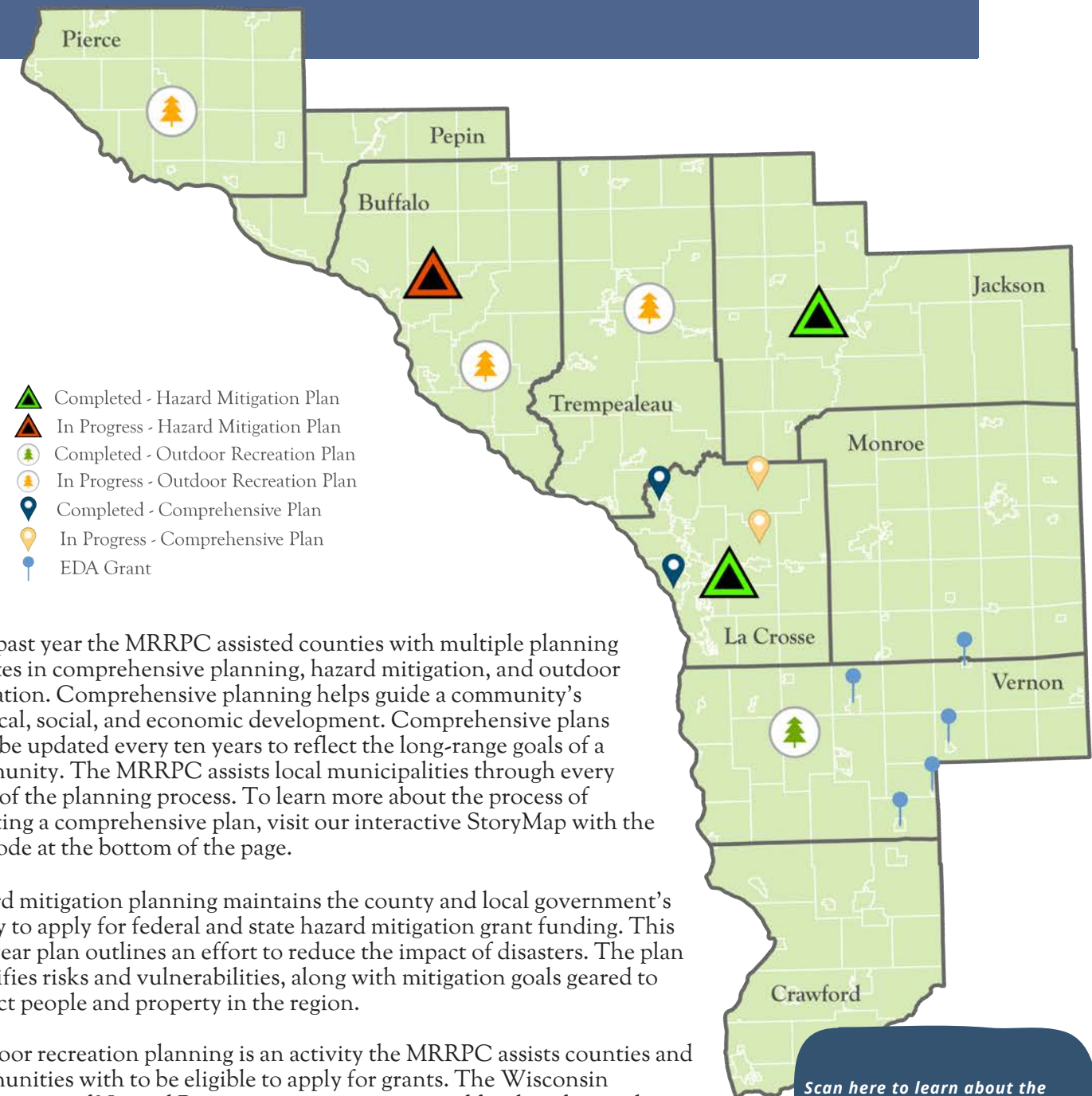
\$5.5 MILLION LOANED TO BUSINESSES

\$47 MILLION OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FUNDING LEVERAGED



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HIGHLIGHTED PROJECTS



This past year the MRRPC assisted counties with multiple planning updates in comprehensive planning, hazard mitigation, and outdoor recreation. Comprehensive planning helps guide a community's physical, social, and economic development. Comprehensive plans must be updated every ten years to reflect the long-range goals of a community. The MRRPC assists local municipalities through every stage of the planning process. To learn more about the process of updating a comprehensive plan, visit our interactive StoryMap with the QR code at the bottom of the page.

Hazard mitigation planning maintains the county and local government's ability to apply for federal and state hazard mitigation grant funding. This five-year plan outlines an effort to reduce the impact of disasters. The plan identifies risks and vulnerabilities, along with mitigation goals geared to protect people and property in the region.

Outdoor recreation planning is an activity the MRRPC assists counties and communities with to be eligible to apply for grants. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources is a main source of funding for outdoor recreation facilities. The Stewardship Program, administered by the DNR, is a fund designed to provide opportunities for outdoor recreation, protect land sensitive to environmental degradation, conserve and restore wildlife habitat, and protect water quality. As a prerequisite to WDNR funding programs, applicants must first submit an outdoor recreation plan that has been approved by a local governing unit, or a plan of a higher unit of government.

Scan here to learn about the comprehensive planning process!

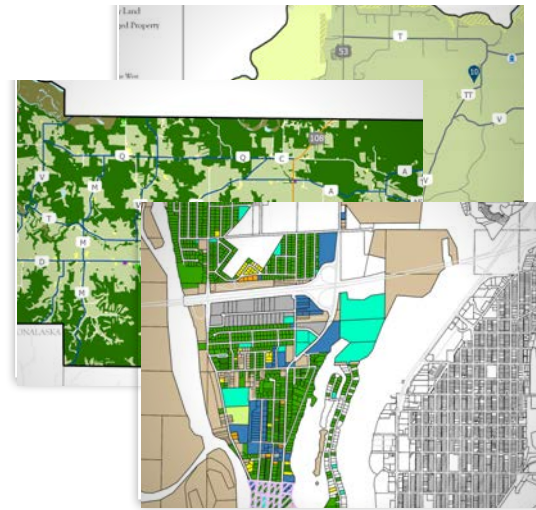


PLANS and GRANTS

COMPREHENSIVE PLANS

In 2021 the Town of Campbell and Town of Holland adopted the updates to their 2021-2040 comprehensive plans. The MRRPC staff assisted the Towns with updates to the plan including demographic data, mapping, hosting open houses, and drafting of the plans. The Town of Holland has high priorities to maintain its rural character, limit development on farmland, and to create and adopt an outdoor recreation plan. The Town of Campbell's vision is to be primarily suburban in character, accommodating low density residential, commercial, and industrial development so long as a land use plan and appropriate programs are in place to continually improve the quality of life and safety of the people in the Town of Campbell.

The MRRPC staff are currently assisting the Town of Hamilton and the Town of Farmington with their comprehensive plan updates. Upcoming public meetings will be used to brainstorm goals and a vision for the towns as they look at the social, economic, and land use changes in the next 10-20 years.



MULTI-HAZARDS MITIGATION PLANS

The La Crosse and Jackson County multi-hazards mitigation plans were completed and adopted in 2021. Flooding and severe snowstorms are the hazards the counties are most vulnerable to and cause the most physical and financial damage. Many development projects presented are brick and mortar projects, such as the purchase of a backup generator for municipal buildings, the installation of larger culverts, a voluntary buyout of homes and businesses located in the 100-year floodplain, the purchase of electronic moveable road signs for road closures, or bank stabilization on roads to prevent landslides.

The MRRPC is in the process of assisting Buffalo County with an update to their multi-hazards mitigation plan. Buffalo County is collecting surveys from local municipalities on risk assessment and goals that would reduce the impact of disasters in the County. The plan will be completed and adopted in 2022.



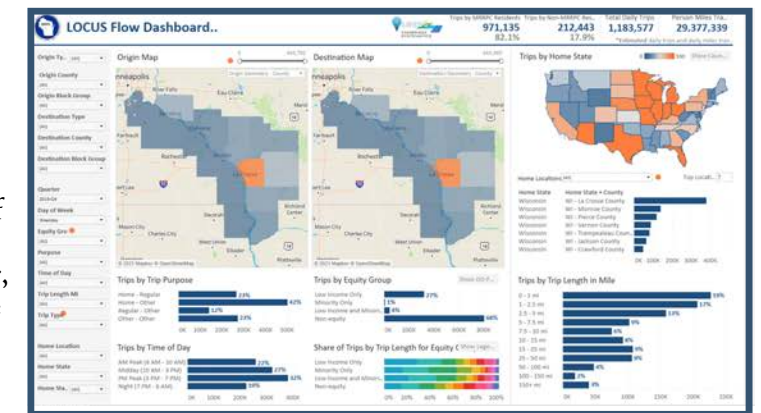
LOCATION BASED DATA

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In early 2021, MRRPC partnered with Cambridge Systematics to develop a location-based services data (LBS) dashboard for the region. The product, LOCUS, collects passively from mobile devices and can provide detailed information about how people are moving, where they are going, and when their travel is occurring throughout the 9 counties. Compared to traditional surveys and travel data, LBS data can be collected for longer periods of time, at more regular intervals, and from a larger sample size.

MRRPC staff will be working with local officials to devise analyses and better understand effects of COVID restrictions on their communities. Ultimately, LBS data will be available from 2019 through the fourth quarter of 2020, and are available at the Census block group level. Further, the team has worked to synthesize the extremely large datasets into easy-to-use and comprehend dashboard summaries and graphics.



Attributes of the data include summaries of: Trip Origin, Trip Destination, Time of Day, Length of Trip, Trip Purpose, and Equity Group information. While this data is traditionally used for transportation modeling and planning, MRRPC Staff looks forward to devising unique and insightful trip summaries for organizations in the region.

REVOLVING LOAN FUNDS



The MRRPC administers four federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) Revolving Loan Funds (RLFs) that provide gap financing to businesses. The Business Capital Fund RLF serving Buffalo, Jackson, Trempealeau, Pepin and Pierce counties made a \$90,000 loan to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul Thrift Store allowing their business to expand operations and purchase an additional building in the City of Durand. Another loan from the Business Capital Fund (BCF) in the amount of \$102,000 was made to Rolling Greens Golf Course with an owner-employee sale that will allow this much needed business to not only continue but grow in the City of Durand. Since inception the four revolving loan funds (RLFs) the MRRPC administers have made 85 business loans totaling over \$5 million, creating or retaining over 700 jobs and leveraging over \$46 million in private financing. For more information about the MRRPC Revolving Loan funds go to our website mrrpc.com.

CARES ACT SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING

NEW WEBSITE



As part of the EDA CARES Act grant funding the MRRPC is launching a new website with a more user friendly interface for those seeking information about the services offered by the MRRPC and our member counties. The new website will be mobile ready in order to be easily viewed on various electronic devices. This improved website will enable the MRRPC to better assist businesses searching for business financing with fillable loan application forms to apply for loans from our five revolving loan funds.

WEBSITE AND MARKETING ASSISTANCE



The COVID-19 Pandemic has had economic impacts on the MRRPC Region. The MRRPC was awarded a United States Department of Commerce – Economic Development Association (EDA) CARES Act grant to assist businesses in our nine county region recover from the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic. As part of this grant, the Commission is scheduling a series of Win the Web webinars to assist businesses with their websites and social media marketing. These webinars will be scheduled in each of our region's nine counties with options for in person attendance and attendance via Zoom. Those opting to participate in person will also have the opportunity to work one-on-one with staff from the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) after the webinar. The first webinars are being scheduled to begin in June 2021.

CARES ACT RLF



The Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA) has partnered with the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission (MRRPC) to oversee and administer a new \$1.05 million CARES Act Business Revolving Loan Fund program. This program will help businesses in Buffalo, Crawford, Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, Pepin, Pierce, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties. The federally sponsored money is focused on job retention and expansion, so \$42,000 can be loaned out for every job retained or created. These funds are intended to help new and existing businesses and non-profits open or expand. Loan payback terms are flexible, and the interest rates will be 1%-2% on average. These funds can help new and existing businesses buy new equipment or help fund ongoing operations. Application forms can be accessed at www.mrrpc.com.

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OUTDOOR RECREATION PLANS

The MRRPC has been assisting Buffalo, Pierce, Trempealeau, and Vernon Counties with outdoor recreation plan updates. The Vernon County plan was completed in 2021. The plan identifies existing county parks and forests with goals and projects the County would like to undertake to improve outdoor recreation opportunities within the county. The highest priorities to residents were to improve and expand on multi-purpose trails and to continue efforts in watershed planning. High priority items determined by the County include improving access to watersheds and navigable streams, providing and promoting fishing opportunities, and expanding on camping opportunities in non-flood prone areas.

Updates to the Buffalo, Pierce, and Trempealeau County plans are in progress. Buffalo County has a high priority to construct multi-purpose trails for landowners and visitors of all ages. The Flyway Trail is a community-driven startup with a mission to create 50 miles of trails in Buffalo County to provide health, safety, recreational, social, and quality of life benefits to all who reside in the region and visitors from across the nation. The Flyway Trail Phase I was completed in 2020 to connect Winona with a bike/pedestrian bridge to the Town of Buffalo Park. Phase II will be to complete the 2.8 miles of trail from the Buffalo Town Hall to the Great River Trail at Marshland. Pierce and Trempealeau County are in the visioning stages of their plan, determining the design and goals of the plan to be completed in 2021.

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While the pandemic was detrimental to many industries, it has boosted business for those in recreation. Recreation and tourism are considered two different entities as tourism typically includes overnight stays and visits to local shops and restaurants, recreation is focused on visiting outdoor facilities and purchasing licenses such as hunting and fishing. The Wisconsin State Department of Natural Resources reported a 24% increase in ATV trail passes, a 100% increase in the number of those buying a fishing license for the first time, and an 18% rise in visits to state parks in 2020.

Wisconsin State Journal reported that direct tourism spending in Wisconsin was down 28.3% in 2020 to \$9.8 billion, a loss of \$3.8 billion. The overall economic impact of tourism in Wisconsin dropped 22.3% to \$17.3 billion. In 2015, trout fishing alone had an annual economic impact of \$1.6 billion in the Driftless Area (Economic Impact of Recreational Trout Angling in the Driftless Area, 2016). As the tourism economy recovers from the shutdown and travel restrictions, there is an anticipated resurgence in overnight stays in upcoming months.

TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS

EDA GRANTS

Kickapoo

Communities located along the Kickapoo River have been economically and socially impacted by flooding events for decades. The last major flood took place in 2018 destroying homes and businesses in the communities along the river. In June 2019, the MRRPC staff submitted an application for a U.S. Department of Commerce – Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant to assist the Villages of Viola, La Farge, Ontario, and Readstown located along the Kickapoo River which have been severely impacted by the flooding. The grant was awarded January 10, 2020. The grant made it possible for these villages to hire consultants to create plans to move their vulnerable business districts out of the floodplain. Requests for Proposals (RFPs) were sent to various consultants in February 2020. Each Village received 9 proposals and met separately to select their consultant. The total project cost was \$925,000 with \$185,000 in local match with the MRRPC as the administrator of the grant. Currently relocation plans have been completed and adopted by the Village Boards in La Farge, Ontario, and Viola. These Villages are now beginning to implement the recommendations within their plans. Readstown has completed infrastructure assessments and business interviews and the plan is on schedule to be approved by the end of this year.

Westby Industrial Park Expansion

The MRRPC staff submitted a grant proposal to the Economic Development Administration (EDA) on behalf of the City of Westby in October 2019 for an industrial park expansion project. This project came to light in lieu of persistent flooding issues in the area negatively affecting the local economy. In April 2020, EDA awarded a \$3.5 million grant to the City of Westby, to make critical infrastructure improvements needed to expand the city's industrial park and protect businesses from severe weather events. The EDA grant, to be matched with \$868,800 in local investment, is expected to create 49 jobs and spur \$15.6 million in private investment. MRRPC staff will continue to assist with the administration of funds from the EDA grant until the completion of the project.



La Farge - Flooding 2018



Ontario - Flooding 2018



Westby Industrial Park Site

The goals of the marketing plan include:

- Identifying untapped markets for users and expanding current user base.
- Developing marketing materials for use inside and on the transit vehicles.
- Developing marketing materials to deploy to current and primary user groups. Currently this includes: Tomah Veteran's Administration Hospital, Gundersen Health System, Mayo Clinic Health System, and Vernon Memorial Hospital.
- Developing social media materials to be deployed on community websites and ridesmrt.com.
- Increasing web and digital presence through other means, exploring mobile-friendly options to suit the range of socio-demographic backgrounds of riders.
- Identifying optimal locations for signage at pickup locations and means of funding installation and maintenance of them.
- Exploring potential revenue streams from sponsored advertising, such as bus wraps
- Exploring innovative joint-marketing opportunities with related services in the region. This can include agencies such as Aging and Disability Resource Centers, Higher Education Facilities, Medical Facilities, La Crosse Municipal Transit Utility, and others.
- Identify effective methods to brand the SMRT Bus as a regional public transportation service available to all individuals.



SMRT BUS MARKETING PLAN

In April 2021, MRRPC contracted with La Crosse firm Vendi Advertising to produce a marketing plan for the SMRT (Scenic Mississippi Regional Transit) Bus Service. The SMRT Bus was established in 2012 and is a fixed route public transportation commuter bus service that operates in western Wisconsin serving four counties (Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe and Vernon). Within the counties, the SMRT bus serves fourteen cities and villages operating approximately 13 round trip routes a day (Mon-Fri) through the region. SMRT Bus service operates from approximately 6:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. SMRT is funded from three primary sources; an annual state/federal public transit grant, farebox revenue, and local matching funds. Local matching funds come from a variety of sources (counties, cities, villages, businesses, additional grant opportunities) and are the key to SMRT Bus service and its continued operation.

The project committee includes officials from La Crosse County, Running, Inc., MRRPC, and the La Crosse Area Planning Committee. Currently, the project is in a discovery phase. Completion is scheduled for late 2021.

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BUILD GRANT

In late 2020, MRRPC was notified that it received one of twelve USDOT BUILD 2020 planning grants. BUILD, formerly known as TIGER, has awarded over \$8.935 billion in grants to projects in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico since 2009. The focus of the MRRPC planning project is to devise a Multimodal Freight Strategy for the 9-County Region. The study includes developing background information on rail, truck, barge, and air freight transportation in the region, generating freight growth projects and system performance for major commodities in the region, and creating content to incorporate into County and local comprehensive plans. The project seeks to support growing and traditional regional industries in a rural area known for agriculture, mining, energy, food production, and industrial commodities. The project will also assess community and environmental impacts of freight movement, including conflicts between passengers and freight, to identify potential safety improvements. Lastly, the project will identify roadways that face disproportionate heavy truck use to better inform state of good repair decisions.

MRRPC is collaborating with WisDOT and FHWA to administer the project, which should officially kickoff by mid-2021.