



**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., April 14, 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: Anurag Komanduri, Cambridge Systematics Project Manager, Amit Modal, Cambridge Systematics Data Scientist, Mike Temp, CPA, Tostrud and Temp S.C., Peter Fletcher, Executive Director La Crosse Area MPO, Jackie Eastwood, Transportation Planner La Crosse Area MPO, Greg Wavrunek, Representing Senator Tammy Baldwin. The attendance roster is attached. There was a brief moment of silence in memory of James Czajkowski.

**Minutes of February 10, 2021 Bimonthly Meeting**

Chairman Kuhn asked for a motion on the February 10, 2021 bimonthly meeting minutes. Commissioner Twidt made a motion to approve the February 10, 2021 bimonthly meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Nickelatti. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments and hearing none, the minutes were unanimously approved.

**Treasurer's Report**

Secretary Burke reported that the February 28, 2021, balance in all accounts was \$477,006.58 and the March 31, 2021, ending balance was \$381,233.04. She reported the beginning balance on February 1, 2021, in all Revolving Loan Fund accounts was \$549,389.47 and the ending balance on March 31, 2021, was \$575,582.35. Secretary/Treasurer reported that she had reconciled all accounts. Mr. Bonifas reported that there were two CARES Act RLF loans approved but not yet disbursed for \$30,000 and \$45,000. Commissioner Borreson asked if there were any loans in default and Mr. Bonifas replied that all the loans were in good standing. Commissioner Borreson made a motion to approve the treasurer's report as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Schlesselman. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments hearing none the Treasurer's Report was unanimously approved.

**Presentation on 2020 MRRPC Audit by Mike Temp, CPA, Tostrud and Temp S.C.**

Mike Temp of Tostrud and Temp S.C. said his firm prepared the 2020 Financial Statements and Independent Auditors report for the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission (MRRPC). He said there were no significant findings when preparing the audit and there were no disagreements with management. He referenced the opinion on page 5 of the audit which was an unmodified opinion and he said that it is what you want to have. He then referred to Page 7.7, the Management's Discussion and Analysis, a laymen's overview of what happened at the Commission the past year. Mr. Temp then reviewed the 2020 Statement of Net Position, Statement of Activities, the 2020 Balance Sheet, and the Reconciliation for Governmental Funds. He also reviewed the balance sheets for the six different revolving loan funds. Mr. Temp opened the floor for questions. Commissioner Borreson asked about page 64 in reference to Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs. Mr. Temp replied that the Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs funds the state All Hazards Mitigation Plans.

**Decision on MRRPC 2020 Audit.**

Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions regarding Mr. Temp's audit presentation. Hearing none he asked for a motion to accept the 2020 Financial Statements and Independent Auditor's Report as presented. Commissioner Twidt made a motion to accept the 2020 Financial Statements and the independent auditor's report as presented. Commissioner Hampson seconded the motion. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments and hearing none, the motion was approved.

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**Presentation by Cambridge Systematics, Anurag Komanduri, Project Manager; Amrit R. Mondal, Data Scientist.**

Mr. Gollnik introduced the firm Cambridge Systematics which has contracted with the MRRPC to provide Location Probe Data to help with economic development activities in the region after the effects of COVID-19. Amrit Modal, Cambridge Systematics Data Scientist reported about how the cellphone probe data is used to spur economic development and to see changes in traveling patterns due to COVID-19. He said that this data will be gathered and presented in a searchable dashboard format.

**Decision on the Executive and Administration Committee's recommendation on 2021 staff wage adjustments.**

Mr. Bonifas reported that the Executive and Administration Committee met on March 30th at the Hampton Inn conference room in La Crosse. He said the committee went into closed session to discuss wage adjustments for the MRRPC staff. He reported that during the open session a motion was made and seconded to recommend a 2.0% increase for the Director Dave Bonifas, Senior Planner Abbey Nicewander, Senior Planner Bob Gollnik and Administrative Assistant Sarah Ofte effective July 1, 2021.

Commissioner Pelock made a motion to approve the Executive and Administration Committee's recommendation of a 2% increase for the Director Dave Bonifas, Senior Planner Abbey Nicewander, Senior Planner Bob Gollnik, and Administrative Assistant Sarah Ofte effective July 1, 2021. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Burke. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments. Commissioner Borreson asked about fringe benefits and if they have increased. Mr. Bonifas replied that the employees are on the state health insurance plan and that it has gone up. He said that the employees are on the lowest plan, but it might have to be looked at if increases occur. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any more questions or comments hearing none the motion was unanimously approved.

**Decision on the Executive and Administration Committee's recommendation on 2022 County Contributions.**

Mr. Bonifas reported that the Executive and Administration Committee was recommending the county contributions per county at last year's total of \$136,998 plus \$2,394 for a staff salary increase of 1% totaling \$139,392 from the counties for 2022 resulting in a county contribution rate of .000498118999% based on 2020 real property equalized values. Commissioner Twidt made a motion to approve 2022 county contributions totaling \$139,392. Commissioner Nickelatti seconded the motion. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments and hearing none the motion was approved.

**Decision on MRRPC request to release EDA's federal interest in EDA revolving loan funds.**

Mr. Bonifas reported that Congress had passed a law to assist with the reduction in paperwork required for annual reporting of EDA Revolving Loan Funds. He said that revolving loan funds that have been operating for at least seven years and are in good standing would be eligible for defederalization. Once the funds are defederalized, the government reporting is no longer required. Mr. Bonifas reported that there are two options for the use of funds: option 1) a continuation as a revolving loan fund or option 2) to use the funds for a typical EDA economic development project. He said that he had discussed the defederalization process with the Business Capital Fund Board and their recommendation was to continue as a revolving loan fund. He also discussed it with the Executive and Administration Committee and their recommendation was to also continue the revolving loan funds. To defederalize the funds EDA needs to have a letter, or a resolution passed by the commission with the decision to continue to operate as a revolving loan fund or an EDA project. Commissioner McMillan Urell made a motion to give Mr. Bonifas the authority to write a letter to EDA requesting the defederalization of all the eligible revolving loan funds and to keep those revolving loan funds operating as revolving loan funds after defederalization. Commissioner Baecker seconded the motion. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments and hearing none, the motion was approved.

**Decision on EMSI Data Contract.**

Ms. Nicewander reported that we use EMSI which is an economic modeling service. She said that it is accessed online where we can select a county, region, or metropolitan area and then output different scenarios such as industry clusters, unemployment, job posting data, and economic impacts for example of an industrial park being built or a factory closing. She reported that EMSI is offering a report to study the impacts of COVID-19 on the economy to be completed in two phases. She said that phase one will include the effects of COVID-19 on unemployment rates, and county and regional analysis with resilient versus non-resilient industries. Phase two will be updating the unemployment percentages and affected industries and how supply chain and demand impact the different industries. She said that these special reports are beyond what we can access, and the cost will be \$17,500 which is part of the CARES Act Funding. A motion was made by Commissioner Burke to approve the contract between EMSI and the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission seconded by Commissioner Vold. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments. Commissioner Borreson asked if EMSI was able to do a deep analysis of broadband. Ms. Nicewander replied that their data was connected to job postings. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any other questions or comments and hearing none, the motion was approved.

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

Mr. Bonifas reported that the new MRRPC website redesign is moving forward and a draft of the homepage layout with changing

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photos has been designed. He said the homepage will highlight grants and public surveys to complete for plans in progress. Some of the interior pages have also been designed and the converting of existing data for the new website is in progress. He also reported that the collaboration with the Small Business Development Center of creating webinars for small businesses to improve their online presence through social media and their business websites is moving forward and scheduled to begin in June in a hybrid model with options for in person participation or participation online through Zoom. The schedule will have one meeting physically scheduled in each of our member counties.

#### **CARES Act Supplemental Funding – Location based data acquisition project.**

Mr. Gollnik reported that at the last bimonthly meeting the firm Cambridge Systematics 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 said that the 2020 data will be ready soon, and information will be sent out to the counties about how to use the data.

#### **SMRT Bus update.**

Mr. Gollnik reported that three RFPs were submitted for the SMRT Bus marketing plan, two local firms and one national firm responded. He said that there is a meeting scheduled with planners from La Crosse County, the staff from the La Crosse Area MPO, Running Inc., and the MRRPC staff to go over the proposals and select a marketing firm at the end of the week. He said that the SMRT Bus has had reduced ridership during COVID-19 and this marketing plan will assist with branding, engaging riders and finding new revenue streams to support the SMRT Bus.

#### **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 to create a Regional Freight Strategy. He said that the Freight Strategy is scoped and ready to go and has been approved with federal guidance. He said he will be meeting with WIDOT and USDOT this week and RFPs for consultants will be going out soon.

#### **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 with the Village of Viola, the Village of La Farge, and the Village of Ontario having adopted their plans. The Village of Ontario is creating a new floodplain map. The Village of Readstown is a little behind the others due to the COVID-19 shutdown of their village office. However, they are on schedule to complete their plan well before the end of the year. He said that Readstown's first draft is set to go to committee in May. He said that all leftover money from each village's 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 two CARES Act revolving loan fund loans have recently been approved: one in Taylor and one in Durand. The loans have been approved but not yet disbursed. He said that there is still \$925,000 to lend to businesses until June of 2022.

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

Ms. Nicewander reported that the City of Westby bid documents were approved by EDA on April 8<sup>th</sup> and now the paperwork for the Army Corps of Engineers has been submitted and they are waiting for a reply.

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

Ms. Nicewander reported that both the Town of Campbell Comprehensive Plan has been approved last night at their town board meeting and the Town of Holland Comprehensive Plan is going to a public hearing on May 5<sup>th</sup> and then to their town board for approval.

#### **Update on the Town of Hamilton and Town of Farmington Comprehensive Plan Updates.**

Mr. Gollnik reported that the Town of Hamilton plan is waiting for some updated census information for their first draft. He said that the Town of Farmington is in the public outreach phase of their plan and surveys have gone out with 100 surveys being returned.

#### **Outdoor Recreation Plan Updates for Vernon County and Buffalo County.**

Vernon County Outdoor Recreation Plan - Ms. Nicewander reported that Vernon County is bringing their Outdoor Recreation Plan to their board for approval. 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 they are working on updating the GIS portion of the plan to have the plan completed by December 2021. She said that she will also be beginning work on a Pierce County Outdoor Recreation Plan.

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### Hazard Mitigation Plan Updates for Jackson County and La Crosse County.

Ms. Nicewander reported the Jackson County board, and the La Crosse County board adopted their Hazard Mitigation Plans and the plans are now going to the municipalities for adoption. She said that work on the Buffalo County Hazard Mitigation Plan has begun with a survey being sent out and she is currently updating the elements of the plan.

### Reports from Commissioners.

Commissioners shared some pressing issues in their counties. **Buffalo County:** Broadband expansion and working with Cochrane Telephone to lay more fiber. Phase 2 of bike trail connecting with Trempealeau County. **La Crosse County:** La Crosse County is working with the City and DNR with PFAS contamination. A very successful COVID vaccination rate with 45% receiving one shot and 22% receiving two shots of vaccine.

### New Business and Adjourn

Chairman Kuhn asked if there was any new business. Mr. Bonifas reported that the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) will need to be updated this year with more information to come at the next board meeting. A motion was made to adjourn by Commissioner Twidt and seconded by Commissioner Schroeder. The motion was unanimously approved.

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Vicki Burke,  
Secretary/ Treasurer

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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
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
Bill Schroeder	Pierce County
Phillip Borreson	Trempealeau County
Margaret Baecker	Trempealeau County
Ernest Vold	Trempealeau County
Herb Cornell	Vernon County
Jo Ann Nickelatti	Vernon County
Dave Bonifas	MRRPC Staff
Bob Gollnik	MRRPC Staff
Abbey Nicewander	MRRPC Staff
Sarah Ofte	MRRPC Staff
Greg Wavrunek	Representing Senior Tammy Baldwin
Jackie Eastwood	Transportation Planner, La Crosse MPO
Peter Fletcher	Director, La Crosse MPO
Anurag Komanduri	Cambridge Systematics
Amit Mondal	Cambridge Systematics