

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission Staff Report on Projects for the Bimonthly Meeting on 6.9.2021

Agenda Topic or Project Name	Purpose, Benefit, Project deliverables, and Contract Amount	Project Time Period	Project Status	Contact
EDA CARES Act MRRPC Supplemental Funding	MRRPC received a \$400,000 grant to assist the region with recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The award timeframe is July 1 st , 2020 through June 30 th , 2022.	July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2022	<p>The MRRPC received an EDA grant to assist us in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. We will be using the grant to do the following: Upgrade existing hardware and software to allow staff to maintain communications during this pandemic; Update county Hazard Mitigation Plans particularly the pandemic section; Upgrade our website to include RFL applications; Conduct webinars for small business websites; Contract out for a SMRT Bus Marketing Plan; Contract out for a Location Based Data project; and to update our existing CEDS to include pandemic resiliency; pay for staff time to assist municipalities and businesses recover from the pandemic.</p> <p>As to date we have completed the following: purchased laptops for all employees, purchased mapping software; selected a consultant to begin working on website upgrade/small business webinars and a separate consultant to work on the Location Based Data project. Held initial meetings to discuss website development and reviewed drafts of what the website could look like; held initial talks between the consultant, Small Business Development Center at UWL and ourselves to discuss small business webinars. Began researching how to incorporate pandemic resiliency into CEDS. Began discussions with consultant to develop a report on the impacts on employment due to COVID.</p>	Dave Bonifas Director 608.785.9396 dave@mrrpc.com
EDA CARES Act MRRPC RLF revitalization	MRRPC received an EDA grant in the amount of up to \$1,050,000 to establish a separate Revolving Loan Fund to assist businesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The final amount will be based upon the amount of loan applications.	Continuous	<p>EDA granted the MRRPC money based upon the original capitalization of its 3 revolving loan funds (The Business Capital Fund, the CMV Growth Development Fund and the La Crosse Economic Development Fund). In an effort to get the money out to businesses EDA also removed eased 3 of its lending criteria. First, the EDA requirement that the lending rate be at least of 75% of the prime rate is waived so we can offer whatever lending rate we choose, secondly there is no criteria of 2 to 1 private to public leveraging requirement and thirdly no bank turn down letter is required. These 3 criteria will be eased for the first 2 years after which they will go back into place. Loan application decisions will be made by the boards of the 3 existing RLF funds based upon the location of the applicant. For example, CMV board members will make the decisions on application from Crawford, Monroe and Vernon Counties.</p> <p>To date 3 loans totaling \$125,000 have been approved. One business is located in Durand,</p>	Dave Bonifas Director 608.785.9396 dave@mrrpc.com

			one in Taylor and one in the city of La Crosse. Additional inquiries have been made regarding the fund, but businesses seem to be waiting to see if additional grants will come out before applying for a loan. An email blast explaining the RLF was sent out to economic development partners in our region.	
EDA CARES Act Supplemental Funding – Website and Consultations	A portion of the CARES Supplemental funding will be used to redesign the MRRPC website and add modern features and functionality. This project will also include training opportunities for local businesses to enhance their web and social media presence.	Start date: January 2021	Staff is contracted DigiSage and held a kickoff and strategy meeting in early January 2020, and continues to work with DigiSage to develop the website and consultation materials. Website is nearly complete, and course outlines and strategy have been agreed upon, in coordination with the UWL Small Business Center	Bob Gollnik Senior Planner 608.785.9396 bob@mrrpc.com
EDA CARES Act Supplemental Funding – SMRT Bus Marketing Plan	A portion of the CARES Supplemental funding will be used to develop a marketing plan to increase ridership, enhance signage, and identify growth opportunities.	Start date: March 2021	RFPs reviewed in February 2021 after by Running, Inc, La Crosse Area Planning Committee, and La Crosse County staff. Selected firm, Vendi, is in the discovery phase and has met with the project committee multiple times. MRRPC staff is working with Vendi to provide background information and the project is aligning with work being done for the LAPC Transit Development Plan.	Bob Gollnik Senior Planner 608.785.9396 bob@mrrpc.com
EDA CARES Act Supplemental Funding – Location-based Data Project	A portion of the CARES Supplemental funding will be used to purchase data and travel pattern analysis to support community businesses, capture tourist opportunities, and support local planning and economic development efforts.	Start date: January 2021	RFP drafted and will be released in October 2020. Received 3 proposals and staff selected Cambridge Systematics and held a kickoff and planning meeting in late January 2021. Gollnik and Nicewander have worked with CS staff to devise a dashboard displaying 2019 Q4 LBS Data. 2020 data will be forthcoming, and MRRPC staff will solicit opportunities for applying the data throughout the region.	Bob Gollnik Senior Planner 608.785.9396 bob@mrrpc.com
MRRPC Build Grant	MRRPC submitted a planning grant proposal to USDOT in May 2020 to develop a “Freight Strategy” for its Counties. Notification of award was in September 2020. The study includes developing background information on 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	Anticipated start date: TBD	Staff is working with Federal Highway Administration and WisDOT through the procurement process and developing and releasing an RFP and will play a large role in project tasks. Gollnik held multiple meetings with both agencies to further clarify agreements and roles for WisDOT and MRRPC. Federal administrative guidance was received in April and project should be able to be kicked off in the next two months.	Bob Gollnik Senior Planner 608.785.9396 bob@mrrpc.com

<p>Report on US Department of Commerce – Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant for economic recovery planning, engineering, real estate appraisal, engineering, and environmental assessment activity for the Villages of Ontario, La Farge, Viola and Readstown.</p>	<p>Economic Recovery Planning is needed by the flood impacted communities of Ontario, La Farge, Viola and Readstown. The following Planning Activities are proposed to assist these communities with economic recovery and long term sustainability: (1) site relocation decision research, (2) site design for community economic development and resettlement, (3) community facility assessment engineering and design, (4) public infrastructure engineering assessment and design, (5) project cost estimating, (6) real estate appraisal, (7) environmental assessment and (8) public participation.</p>	<p>June 2020-December 2021</p>	<p>Grant application was submitted in June 2019. The total project will be \$925,000 with \$185,000 in local match. The MRRPC received a letter dated January 10, 2020 that EDA has approved the grant. RFP's were sent out in February. Each Village received 9 proposals. Each Village met separately and selected who they wanted to have as a consultant.</p> <p>Individual Consultants have been working with the Villages. Readstown selected SHC, Ontario selected MSA and both Viola and La Farge selected Vierbicher.</p> <p>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 recommendation within the plan using money from the grant that was not used to develop the plan. The Villages are allowed to use money from the grant to implement the plan as long as it is not used for construction. All three of the villages have begun applying for State and Federal grants to implement their plan.</p> <p>Readstown is a little behind the other villages due to the Villages offices closing down for the month of December and the Village wanting to get as much public input as possible. Infrastructure assessments and business interviews have been completed. A draft Economic Recovery Plan was submitted to the Village Board in April.</p>	<p>Dave Bonifas Director 608.785.9396 dave@mrrpc.com</p>
<p>Report on City of Westby Industrial Park EDA Grant.</p>	<p>The Cities of Mondovi and Westby are both pursuing Federal EDA grants to develop new industrial parks. Mondovi's New Industrial Park will be located on the City's West side it will be 210 acres in size and serve an expanding industry that will locate there and create 25 jobs. Included within the boundary of the industrial park will be the City's new wastewater treatment facility that will use an anerobic digester that will also generate electricity for the City. The total project cost is expected to be \$7.5 million with 50% the costs hopefully covered by a Federal EDA grant. The City of Westby is planning a 74-acre industrial park on the north side with costs totaling \$4.3 million, hoping that an EDA grant will cover 80% the costs due to disaster declaration.</p>	<p>Westby's grant application was submitted on Grants.Gov on October 3, 2019. Requested additional information was submitted on November 30, 2019.</p>	<p>Westby's Grant application was submitted on October 3, 2019.</p> <p>EDA announced the financial award for Westby April 21, 2020.</p> <p>EDA approved all bid documentation on March 16th. The bid opening date was April 8th, 2021. Westby is recommending Badger Environmental and Earthworks, Inc. to selected. They were the lowest bid approximately 6.5% below the estimated construction budget. The top two recommendations were sent to EDA with bid documentation. We are awaiting approval and for some additional bid documentation to be signed off by the Westby attorney.</p>	<p>Abbey Nicewander Planner 608.785.9396 abbey@mrrpc.com</p>

T. Campbell Comprehensive Plan Update	March 2020, the Town of Campbell signed a contract to update their Comprehensive Plan with MRRPC. This plan was a cost share agreement of \$12,000, half from MRRPC, half from the Town of Campbell.	March 1, 2020- May, 31, 2021	The Town of Campbell adopted their comprehensive plan on April 16 th , 2021. Major updates were done to the facilities map, future land use map, and 5 year action plan. The Town's survey showed a desire for residents to have more outdoor recreation opportunities such as hiking, and biking routes. The biggest issue facing the Town is fighting annexation to the City of La Crosse. Their 20 year boundary agreement ends January 1 st , 2025.	Abbey Nicewander Planner 608.785.9396 abbey@mrrpc.com
T. Holland Comprehensive Plan Update	September 2020, the Town of Holland signed a contract to update their Comprehensive Plan with MRRPC. This plan was a cost share agreement of \$12,000, half from MRRPC, half from the Town of Campbell.	September 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021	The Town of Holland adopted their plan May 12 th , 2021. Many updates were made to this plan to update maps – utilities with the Badger Coulee Line (2018), parks and facilities, and future land use. The new 5 year plan was updated to reflect the progress the Town had made. One of their first goals is to adopt an outdoor recreation plan and create an ad-hoc committee for trail development. MRRPC is working with them to assist in the development of an outdoor recreation plan. They desire the continued protection of farmland from development and will promote new development in and around existing residential areas.	Abbey Nicewander Planner 608.785.9396 abbey@mrrpc.com
T. Hamilton Comprehensive Plan Update	In October 2020, the Town of Holland signed a contract to update its Comprehensive Plan with MRRPC.	November 2020 – June 2021	MRRPC staff has met with the planning committee and charted out the schedule and anticipated outreach. A flyer was distributed with the utility bills in December 2020 and will include links for information and surveys. Surveys have been distributed to patrons of the town dump and online. Survey results have been compiled and other elements of the plan continue to be updated The plan update is on schedule.	Bob Gollnik Senior Planner 608.785.9396 bob@mrrpc.com
T. Farmington Comprehensive Plan Update	In March 2021, the Town of Farmington signed a contract with MRRPC to update its Comprehensive Plan.	March 2021 – September 2021	MRRPC staff has met with the planning committee and charted out the schedule and anticipated outreach. Surveys were mailed to each resident and also distributed at town hall and online. Outreach follow-up is currently being discussed and other elements of the plan are being updated. The plan update is on schedule.	Bob Gollnik Senior Planner 608.785.9396 bob@mrrpc.com
Vernon County Outdoor Recreation Plan Update	As part of receiving annual county contributions, the MRRPC updates and maintains county outdoor recreation plans. The MRRPC is currently working with Vernon County on updating the county's outdoor recreation plan.	July 2020- February 2021	The Vernon County Outdoor Rec. Plan is going to the LWCD meeting to recommend the adoption to the County Board in June. Vernon County wanted to design this plan as a marketing tool. It now lists annual events, parks, and activities and amenities available at each park. High priority items in the next five years are to improve access to watersheds for fishing and recreational boaters, promote fishing opportunities in the area (new interactive map of trout stream locations), and campsite expansion in non-flood prone areas.	Abbey Nicewander Planner 608.785.9396 abbey@mrrpc.com

Buffalo County Outdoor Recreation Plan Update	As part of receiving annual county contributions, the MRRPC updates and maintains county outdoor recreation plans. The MRRPC is currently working with Vernon County on updating the county's outdoor recreation plan.	October 2020-March 2021	A first draft of the plan will go to the committee in April. A representative from the National Eagle Center attended the committee meeting as committee members desire to make a birding map in Buffalo County. This would include species and locations of birds in Buffalo County for birdwatching opportunities. Staff also collected data locations of restored bluff prairies in Buffalo County and a map was made to be included in the plan. The June meeting will be to determine high priority goals of Buffalo County outdoor recreation in the next five years.	Abbey Nicewander Planner 608.785.9396 abbey@mrrpc.com
New Outdoor Recreation Plan Update Requests	Pierce County, Trempealeau County, T. Holland have requested staff to update their expiring plans.	Ongoing	Pierce County is desiring an update to their plan to update demographic data and mapping. Trempealeau County will have an upcoming visioning meeting in June to determine goals of the County and desired outcomes of the plan. Town of Holland would like to expand on their master parks plan to include trail systems.	Abbey Nicewander Planner 608.785.9396 abbey@mrrpc.com
Buffalo County Hazard Mitigation	Update the Buffalo County Hazard Mitigation Plan. A grant application was submitted to WEM in the amount of \$40,000. Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plans are prepared to reduce costs and losses from natural disasters for counties and municipalities	2020-2022	The grant application was submitted to WEM in November 2019. The grant has been awarded. A contract with Buffalo County was signed by Buffalo County in January 2021. Work on the plan began in February. Surveys were sent out to municipalities in April and have a deadline of June 12 th . MRRPC staff is updating demographic data, storm events, and maps in the plan.	Abbey Nicewander Planner 608.785.9396 abbey@mrrpc.com
Scenic Mississippi Regional Transit (SMRT) bus serving Crawford, Vernon, Monroe, and La Crosse counties	<p>Develop a fixed route public transportation service for Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, and Vernon Counties. Bus transportation will service commuters, elderly, disabled, medical appointments, and personal travel.</p> <p>Projected operating costs for 2020 are approximately \$460,000. Funding comes from a federal DOT grant, local governments, corporate donations, Bremer Foundation Grants, and the fare box.</p>	Service Began on December 3, 2012 - present	<p>The SMRT Bus has been operating for over six years serving La Crosse, Vernon, Crawford, and Monroe Counties. In 2017 ridership decreased by about 6%. In 2018 ridership rebounded on the SMRT system and increased by 9% over 2017 ridership. Ridership in 2019 decreased approximately 10% over 2018 ridership numbers. In 2020, ridership numbers have been dramatically impacted by COVID restrictions, but are slowly increasing. Ridership for the three medical facilities have been a large percentage of riders in recent months. SMRT has not reduced service due to COVID. Our core ridership is health care employees, who obviously continue to need transportation. Having the Transit service available to them to reduce stress on their commute seems to be a significant factor in their quality of life. We have seen reduced ridership, but not significant reductions in demand.</p> <p>On July 19, 2019, The SMRT Bus system through La Crosse County as the applicant, was awarded a \$492,570 in federal funds to acquire 2 battery electric cutaway buses and associated infrastructure equipment to serve the SMRT system. SMRT routes continue to be analyzed by the WISDOT electric bus contractor to determine if electric buses are capable of serving its route</p>	Bob Gollnik Senior Planner 608.785.9396 bob@mrrpc.com

			<p>distances and terrain. MRRPC staff assisted La Crosse County with the electric bus application and the successful Bremer Foundation grant to help cover operating costs. MRRPC has also assisted in electrification.</p> <p>On May 13, 2019, the SMRT Bus system added a mid-day route between La Crosse-Tomah. The additional route will provide more flexibility for riders to use the bus for medical appointments, school, and daily activities. Providing three runs a day from La Crosse to Tomah and points in between.</p> <p>SMRT is further discussing electric bus purchase and sustainable revenue streams beyond 2021.</p>	
DOT Contract Work	<p>WisDOT is beginning to update two long-range plans: Connect 2050 (the Long-Range State Transportation Plan), and the Wisconsin Rail Plan 2050.</p> <p>In addition, the LAPC is in the process of updating the MPO Plan, Beyond Coulee Vision 2040.</p>	Ongoing through 2021	<p>Staff will serve as a regional representative for MRRPC communities and will assist with Public Input and technical activities, as necessary. Staff is reviewing and providing comments on the MPO plan.</p>	<p>Bob Gollnik Senior Planner 608.785.9396 bob@mrrpc.com</p>