



**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., August 11, 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: Peter Fletcher, Executive Director La Crosse Area MPO, Tim Hundt, Representing Representative Ron Kind, Ray French, WEDC, Mark Tallman, WEDC, Rebecca Giroux, WHEDA, Francis Schelfhout, WI DOT, and Roxie Anderson, Monroe County Planner. The attendance roster is attached.

**Minutes of June 9, 2021, Bimonthly Meeting**

Chairman Kuhn asked for a motion on the June 9, 2021, bimonthly meeting minutes. Commissioner Twidt made a motion to approve the June 9, 2021, bimonthly meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Schlesselman. 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 June 30, 2021 ending balance in all accounts was 413,522.79 and the July 31, 2021, ending balance was \$404,225.66. She reported the beginning balance on June 1, 2021, in all Revolving Loan Fund accounts was \$601,832.19 and the ending balance on July 31, 2021, was \$631,222.49. Secretary/Treasurer reported that she had reconciled all accounts. Commissioner Pelock made a motion to approve the treasurer's report as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Twidt. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments hearing none the Treasurer's Report was unanimously approved.

**Presentation by Francis Schelfhout WI DOT on Mississippi River Trail Bicycle Route - Wisconsin**

Mr. Schelfhout presented information about the Mississippi River Trail Bicycle Route of Wisconsin's portion of the trail. He reported that the trail spans approximately 3,000 miles from Minnesota to Louisiana and spans 10 States, and 8 of the 10 include route signage and bike route designation with approximately 250 miles of the trail in Wisconsin. He said that the goal is to make the Mississippi River Trail (MRT) a form designation through 8 Wisconsin Great River Road counties with signage along the MRT route in Wisconsin.

**CEDS Update – Goal Setting**

Mr. Bonifas reported that the next steps in continuing to update our Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is to establish goals. A definition of a goal is something we desire to achieve or solve. He said that the goals will be derived from our SWOT analysis activity from the previous meeting. He shared previous goals and objectives. From the discussion broadband infrastructure and housing and childcare were found to be pressing issues for the region. Mr. Bonifas said that at the next bimonthly meeting objectives will be created for the five goals along with ways of measuring and tracking success.

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***Providing Planning and Economic Development Services to Improve the Environment, Economy and Quality of life***  
***• Land Use Planning and Zoning Assistance • Transportation Planning • Economic Development Planning • Recreation Planning • Business Lending • Grant Writing • Economic Data Dissemination • Assisting Local Interests in Responding to State, Federal and Private Programs • Advisory Services on Planning and Development Issues • Coordinator for Programs and Activities • Advocate on Issues Affecting the Region***

### **EDA American Recovery Plan Act Programs**

Mr. Bonifas reported that on March 11, 2021, President Biden signed the American Rescue Plan Act into law which designated \$3 billion for EDA to assist with the economic recovery from the Coronavirus. He said that there are six categories of grants for funding 1) Statewide Planning Research and Networks 2) Build Back Better Regional Challenge 3) Travel, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation 4) Economic Adjustment Assistance 5) Indigenous Communities and 6) Good Jobs Challenge. He discussed the handout which outlines all the grants and eligibility requirements. He encouraged the municipalities to call our office and discuss their projects to see how they would fit the eligibility for funding.

### **WEDC Brick and Mortar Bounce Back Grant**

Mr. Bonifas reported that the WEDC received \$50 million through a grant program. The WEDC is using the Regional Planning Commissions in the state and a few other agencies to administrate this grant program. He said that this program awards \$10,000 grants to businesses that move into a vacant building or structure. The objective of the program is to fill those vacant commercial spaces on main streets which were affected by COVID. He reported that our region was awarded \$975,000 for our nine county region. He said the application process is straight forward and the applications are reviewed by staff. Businesses that move into their buildings between January 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022 and have a 12 month lease or purchase the building are eligible for the grant. He said that staff verifies the information in the application and once it has been approved the business is issues a \$10,000 check. WEDC has also provided \$20,000 for administration costs to the commission plus \$250 per approved loan application.

### **Decision on Town of Shelby Comprehensive Plan Contract**

Ms. Nicewander reported that the commission is entering into a contract with the Town of Shelby to update its Comprehensive Plan. It is similar to the other comprehensive plan contracts we have entered into in the past, with a total contract of \$12,000 and a cost sharing agreement with \$6,000 from the Town of Shelby and \$6,000 from the commission. She said that the contract will work along the same timeframe as the La Crosse County Comprehensive Plan with May 2022 as the completion date. Commissioner Burke made a motion to approve the contract between the Town of Shelby and the Mississippi River Regional Planning to update the Town of Shelby Comprehensive Plan. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Chown. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments hearing none the contract was unanimously approved.

### **CARES Act Supplemental Funding**

**Website Upgrade:** Mr. Bonifas reported that the website upgrade is nearing completion and is more user friendly. He said that we are still working on creating applications online for businesses to apply for the other revolving loan funds, Business Capital Fund, CMV Growth Development Fund, and the La Crosse County Business Fund. He asked for pictures of our counties to add to the photo gallery on the website.

**Small Business Website Assistance:** Mr. Bonifas reported that the Win the Web webinars and in person workshops are set to begin in September. There will be one face to face workshop scheduled in each county. The topics include website creation, social media marketing, and increasing your business's social media presence on the Internet. For those attending in person the Small Business Development Center is available for one-on-one counseling after the workshop. Information about the Win the Web webinars is also listed on the MRRPC website [www.mrrpc.com](http://www.mrrpc.com).

**Location Based data acquisition project:** Mr. Gollnik reported that Cambridge Systematics has created a dashboard of location-based data or cellphone probe data. He said that 2019 and 2020 data was requested to see the changes due to COVID-19. He said that the snapshot data that they have reviewed showed a 40% reduction in daily travel in those areas pinpointed and in the nine-county region there were 500,000 daily trips less in 2020. He said that he is talking with local communities and counties about how the data can be used for economic development and planning.

**SMRT Bus Marketing Plan:** Mr. Gollnik reported that Vendi Advertising was awarded the contract for developing the SMRT Bus marketing plan and have begun the discovery phase of the plan. Vendi is researching the statistics of the SMRT Bus, existing conditions, and similar bus services. A meeting will be held next week to discuss their findings. He said that they have created some goals such as improving the SMRT Bus's marketing presence and to identify more sustainable funding sources. He said currently SMRT Bus funding is a combination of local match and business contributions. He said that Vendi wants to increase the SMRT Bus's visibility with current and potential riders and improve our online presence. He reported that there are 1200 riders a month and the SMRT Bus committee voted to pursue the purchase of two electric buses to be used on the most heavily used route, the blue route which travels from Viroqua to La Crosse.

**EMSI report:** Ms. Nicewander reported that EMSI is an economic modeling software and we contracted with the company to develop COVID-19 economic impact reports and unemployment reports for each of our counties and the region. She said that the data would be looking at what industries and sectors were impacted the most from COVID-19. She said that the reports would be available mid-September.

**Revolving Loan Fund:** Mr. Bonifas reported that there were three CARES Act Revolving Loan Fund loans that were approved; one in Vernon County, one in Crawford County, and one in Pierce County for a total of \$384,000. There was one loan that was denied but the business is reapplying and providing additional information regarding the collateral that was lacking in the first application. There are other applications pending and when all of the CARES Act RLF money is loaned out there are our regular Revolving Loan funds to use to help businesses, Business Capital Fund, CMV Growth Development Fund, and the La Crosse Business Fund.

**BUILD Grant update.**

Mr. Gollnik reported that WISDOT and FHWA have been meeting weekly to gather data and background material for the Freight Strategy for example socio demographics information. He said that he is waiting for the USDOT and the FWHA to approve the contract by the end of September. Mr. Gollnik reported that he has an RFP ready to be sent out once he is given the approval by WISDOT and FHWA.

**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 Villages of Ontario, La Farge, and Viola have all approved their plans and now are working towards implementation of the plans. These communities had \$200,000 to create a plan and any funds that were not used for the plan could then be used for plan implementation as long as it was not used for a construction project. He said that all of the consultants are now using any extra funds to implement these plans for activities such as land surveys and soil borings that are not construction related. He said that we have until December 31<sup>st</sup> of this year to complete the plans and the villages are on schedule to meet the deadline.

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

Ms. Nicewander reported that the City of Westby is moving forward with their industrial park project and a preconstruction meeting was held with the City of Westby, Badger Environmental, and Delta 3, and construction began in July. She said that construction was slated to be completed by next spring and reimbursement requests for the work completed will be going out this week.

**Reports from Commissioners.**

No comments.

**New Business and Adjourn**

Chairman Kuhn asked if there was any new business. Hearing none 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

<b>MRRPC Bimonthly Meeting Attendees</b>	
<b>Name</b>	<b>Representing</b>
Del Twidt	Buffalo County
Mary Anne McMillan Urell	Buffalo County
John Schlesselman	Buffalo County
Dennis Pelock	Crawford County
Gerald Krachey	Crawford County
Michael Higgins	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
Bill Schroeder	Pierce County
Neil Gulbranson	Pierce County
James Kraft	Pepin County
Chris Kees Winkler	Pepin County
Phillip Borreson	Trempealeau County
Ernest Vold	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
Tim Hundt	Representing Representative Ron Kind
Peter Fletcher	Director, La Crosse MPO
Roxie Anderson	Monroe County Planner
Rebecca Giroux	WHEDA
Mark Tallman	WEDC
Ray French	WEDC
Francis Schelfhout	WI DOT