

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission Staff Report on Projects for the Bimonthly Meeting on 8.11.2021

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 6 loans totaling \$509,000 have been approved. One business is located in Durand,</p>	Dave Bonifas Director 608.785.9396 dave@mrrpc.com

			<p>one in Taylor, one in the city of La Crosse, one in Hagar City, one in Crawford County, and one in Vernon County. In addition, we currently have 3 applications pending. Other inquiries have been made regarding the fund, but a lot of these 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.</p>	
EDA CARES Act Supplemental Funding – Website and Consultations	<p>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.</p>	<p>Start date: January 2021</p>	<p>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 complete, and course outlines, schedules, and strategy have been agreed upon, in coordination with the UWL Small Business Center. “Win the Web” sessions are booked in multiple counties through September and October.</p>	<p>Bob Gollnik Senior Planner 608.785.9396 bob@mrrpc.com</p>
EDA CARES Act Supplemental Funding – SMRT Bus Marketing Plan	<p>A portion of the CARES Supplemental funding will be used to develop a marketing plan to increase ridership, enhance signage, and identify growth opportunities.</p>	<p>Start date: March 2021</p>	<p>RFPs reviewed in February 2021 after by Running, Inc, La Crosse Area Planning Committee, and La Crosse County staff.</p> <p>Selected firm, Vendi, is in the discovery phase and has met with the project committee multiple times. MRRPC staff continues to work with Vendi to provide background information and the project is aligning with work being done for the LAPC Transit Development Plan.</p> <p>Vendi is also assisting staff to strategize and develop materials to pursue funding from public and private agencies in the region.</p>	<p>Bob Gollnik Senior Planner 608.785.9396 bob@mrrpc.com</p>
EDA CARES Act Supplemental Funding – Location-based Data Project	<p>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.</p>	<p>Start date: January 2021</p>	<p>RFP drafted and will be released in October 2020.</p> <p>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 was received in late June, and MRRPC staff has begun meeting with agencies to identify applications opportunities for applying the data throughout the region.</p>	<p>Bob Gollnik Senior Planner 608.785.9396 bob@mrrpc.com</p>
MRRPC Build Grant	<p>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</p>	<p>Anticipated start date: TBD</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>Gollnik held multiple meetings with both agencies to further clarify agreements and roles for WisDOT and MRRPC.</p> <p>Contractual documents drafted in collaboration with WisDOT are being reviewed for clearance by</p>	<p>Bob Gollnik Senior Planner 608.785.9396 bob@mrrpc.com</p>

			<p>FHWA and USDOT staff. A September approval is expected.</p> <p>Meanwhile MRRPC and WisDOT are identifying project tasks to move forward with while waiting on Federal processing.</p>	
<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 four Village. 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. Three of the villages have begun applying for State and Federal grants to implement their plan. The Village of Readstown will be using their money left over from developing the plan for engineering work.</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. Construction started construction in July. The first disbursement of the grant was given by EDA in the first week of August.</p>	<p>Abbey Nicewander Planner 608.785.9396 abbey@mrrpc.com</p>

T. Shelby Comprehensive Plan Update	T. of Shelby wants to contract with MRRPC in August, 2021 for a Comprehensive Plan update.. This plan was a cost share agreement of \$12,000, half from MRRPC, half from the Town of Shelby.	August 11, 2021 – June 30, 2022	The Town of Shelby has signed a contract to update their Comprehensive Plan in concurrence with the La Crosse County Comprehensive Plan update. They hope to stay on the same schedule with updates as the County plan.	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, and a draft final plan will be distributed to the planning committee in August.	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 committee recently discussed goals and strategies for the Town 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 was adopted by the Vernon County Board of Supervisors June 21, 2021.	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 July meeting determined goals and led to the completion of a draft of the plan. The draft is being reviewed and awaiting to go to the County Board for approval.	Abbey Nicewander Planner 608.785.9396 abbey@mrrpc.com

<p>New Outdoor Recreation Plan Update Requests</p>	<p>Pierce County, Trempealeau County, Pepin County, Jackson County, T. Holland have requested staff to update their expiring plans.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>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. Jackson County would like a completed plan by December 2021.</p>	<p>Abbey Nicewander Planner 608.785.9396 abbey@mrrpc.com</p>
<p>Buffalo County Hazard Mitigation</p>	<p>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</p>	<p>2020-2022</p>	<p>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 12th. MRRPC staff is updating demographic data, storm events, and maps in the plan. A second round of survey results was received. MRRPC has been meeting with County departments to review department goals.</p>	<p>Abbey Nicewander Planner 608.785.9396 abbey@mrrpc.com</p>
<p>Scenic Mississippi Regional Transit (SMRT) bus serving Crawford, Vernon, Monroe, and La Crosse counties</p>	<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>	<p>Service Began on December 3, 2012 - present</p>	<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 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</p>	<p>Bob Gollnik Senior Planner 608.785.9396 bob@mrrpc.com</p>

			<p>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	Staff will serve as a regional representative for MRRPC communities and will assist with Public Input and technical activities, as necessary.	<p>Bob Gollnik Senior Planner 608.785.9396 bob@mrrpc.com</p>