



**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., October 13, 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, Jackie Eastwood, Transportation Planner La Crosse Area MPO, Rebecca Giroux, WHEDA, Jenny Kuderer-Radcliff, Dairyland Power, Carol Roth, Driftless Development, Inc., Tyler Hendricks, Representing Representative Ron Kind, Ray French, WEDC, Roxie Anderson, Monroe County Planner, Israel Haas, UW-La Crosse Student. The attendance roster is attached.

Minutes of August 11, 2021, Bimonthly Meeting

Chairman Kuhn asked for a motion on the August 11, 2021, bimonthly meeting minutes. Commissioner Twidt made a motion to approve the August 11, 2021, bimonthly meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Vold. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments and hearing none, the minutes were unanimously approved.

Treasurer's Report

Secretary Burke stepped out and asked Mr. Bonifas to give the report. He reported that the August 31, 2021, ending balance in all accounts was \$387,151.81 and the September 30, 2021, ending balance was \$371,520.55. He reported the beginning balance on August 1, 2021, in all Revolving Loan Fund accounts was \$631,222.49 and the ending balance on September 30, 2021, was \$1,206,827.28. Commissioner Pelock made a motion to approve the treasurer's report as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Borreson. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments hearing none the Treasurer's Report was unanimously approved.

Presentation by Rebecca Giroux, Business and Community Engagement Officer, Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA).

Ms. Giroux presented information about the different programs that the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA) has to offer to assist with expanding equitable access to affordable housing and economic opportunity. She presented information about how WHEDA's programs can help move affordable housing projects forward in the region's communities.

CEDS Update Goals and Strategies

Mr. Bonifas reviewed the five goals that were established at the last bimonthly meeting and presented the strategies he development to go with the goals established for the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). He presented the strategies for feedback from the group. After discussion, strategies: to encourage businesses to help address childcare and elder care needs for their employees; support solar power projects; support corridor transportation planning; establish data on regional workforce gaps; work with businesses to have immigrants fill workplace gaps and attend towns association meetings were asked to be added. Mr. Bonifas said that he would take all comments to revise the strategies for the final draft.

Decision Resolution regarding the WI DOT 2022 Work Program.

Mr. Gollnik reported that the Draft Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission Transportation Planning Annual Work Program for 2022 was completed and sent to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation for their review. The plan is very similar to the plan from last year. There are six elements in the work program and time is allocated to each element. He said the work program is required to receive Wisconsin (DOT) funding and the resolution is in the packets to be passed to approve the plan. A motion was made to approve the Resolution 20201013-1 to adopt the 2022 Transportation Work Program by Commissioner Twidt and seconded by Commissioner Pelock. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments. The motion was unanimously approved.

EDA American Recovery Plan Act Programs.

Mr. Bonifas reported that he has been working collaboratively with other counties to apply for funds from the EDA American Recovery Plan Act Programs (ARPA). The first program applied for was a Build Back Better Grant. He said the MRRPC is working with the Southwest Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, a planning commission in Northeast Iowa, and a development organization out of Illinois to create DINER (Driftless Incubator Network and Enterprise Region). The grant is based on the food processing industries in the region which are a huge economic driver. Areas impacted in our region include expanding food incubators such as the Coulee Region Business Center in La Crosse and the Food Enterprise Center in Viroqua. The City of Hillsboro was also looking at an expansion of their wastewater treatment plant due to currently having 2/3 of their input coming from two cheese plants. They are under orders from the DNR to update their facility since they are not in compliance. Mr. Bonifas said that the first phase is to apply for a feasibility study for \$500,000. EDA is going to select between 50 to 60 regions to award them with a feasibility study. He said that the next phase will be the implementation phase and 20 to 30 regions will be awarded a grant. He said that October 19 is the deadline for the feasibility study deadline and March 15 is the deadline for the implementation phase of the grant. Mr. Bonifas said that we are assisting the Southwest Regional Planning Commission with the grant, and they are writing the grant. This is a \$5 million grant \$500,000 per application. He said two tourism ARPA Grants are being pursued one with Vernon County and one with the City of Prescott. Vernon County is applying for funds to help with dredging a lake and watershed kiosks. He said that the City of Prescott is working on a tourism grant to help development along their waterfront and connecting a park with their downtown area. Another ARPA Grant is a Good Jobs challenge with a K-20 educational opportunity. He said that Ashley Furniture has a mobile teaching semi that they bring to four different high schools to teach the students about manufacturing jobs and careers. Mr. Bonifas said that he is working with many different entities such as 7 Rivers Alliance, Western Wisconsin Technical College, CESAs, and Ashley Furniture to find someone to take the lead on the project. The deadline is January 26th for the grant.

WEDC Brick and Mortar Bounce Back Grants

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 administer this grant program. He said that this program awards \$10,000 grants to businesses that move into a vacant building or structure. He reported that our region was awarded up to \$2,020,000 for our nine county region with \$20,000 for startup administration costs and auditing and then \$250 for each approved \$10,000 grant. 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 as of October 13 there have been 232 inquiries about the grant. We have received 84 completed applications awarded 49 \$10,000 grants. There have been applications from every county in our region.

CARES Act Supplemental Funding

Website Upgrade: Mr. Bonifas reported that the website upgrade is completed.

Small Business Website Assistance: Mr. Bonifas reported that the Win the Web webinars and in person workshops began in September. There will be one face to face workshop scheduled in each county. He said that the workshops offered include Website 101 and Building a website, Introduction to Search Engine Optimization, Introduction to Social Media, Cybersecurity basics, E-commerce 101: planning an online store, Advanced Search Engine Optimization, Creating Effective Content for your Website, Building a Wix Website and Building a Square Space website. 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. The webinars are free of charge.

Location Based data acquisition project: Mr. Gollnik reported that Cambridge Systematics continues to revise its dashboard. He said that he is talking with local communities and counties about how the data can be used for economic development and planning. Mr. Gollnik said that he is creating snapshots of data for communities and has presented the information at the La Crosse MPO Bi-State Conference.

SMRT Bus Marketing Plan: Mr. Gollnik reported that he has received from Vendi Advertising a package of graphics and a presentation template to use with public and private potential SMRT Bus donors or sponsors. Vendi is working on upgrading the SMRT Bus social media presence and ways for long term funding of the SMRT Bus.

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 reported that EMSI Burning Glass has completed the reports and has created a COVID Impact Report for each of the nine counties in our regions as well as a regional report. She said that the report shows the job loss due to COVID and the effects it is having as well as the recovery. She said that the reports can be accessed on the webpage at www.mrrpc.com.

Revolving Loan Fund: Mr. Bonifas reported that there was a CARES Act Revolving Loan Fund to a Distillery in Buffalo County that was just approved, and the loan closing will be happening soon. There is also another loan in Vernon County that was approved with some contingencies of SBA funding and will be going before the CMV board for approval and disbursement.

BUILD Grant update.

Mr. Gollnik reported that WISDOT and FHWA have approved the contract and given us a notice to proceed, and the RFP has been released. He said that there are only 5 or 6 companies that do this type of work required in the RFP.

Update on 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 31st 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 Delta 3 has been working on the construction. She said that construction was slated to be completed by next spring and a \$1 million of the \$4.3 million has been drawn down.

Reports from Commissioners.

Commissioner Borreson reported that a \$4 million Blair-Taylor school referendum has passed to build a daycare center addition in the school. He raised the concern for staffing these childcare centers and how COVID has impacted them.

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.

Vicki Burke,
Secretary/ Treasurer

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
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
Richard Purdy	Pierce County
Chris Kees Winkler	Pepin County
Phillip Borreson	Trempealeau County
Ernest Vold	Trempealeau County
Nancy Jaekel	Vernon County
Dave Bonifas	MRRPC Staff
Bob Gollnik	MRRPC Staff
Abbey Nicewander	MRRPC Staff
Sarah Ofte	MRRPC Staff
Tyler Hendricks	Representing Representative Ron Kind
Peter Fletcher	Director, La Crosse MPO
Jackie Eastwood	Transportation Planner, La Crosse MPO
Roxie Anderson	Monroe County Planner
Rebecca Giroux	WHEDA
Carol Roth	Executive Director, Driftless Development Inc.
Ray French	WEDC
Jenny Kuderer-Radcliff	Dairyland Power
Israel Haas	UW-La Crosse Student