



**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., December 8, 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: Mark Tallman, WEDC, Peter Fletcher, Executive Director La Crosse Area MPO, Tyler Hendricks, Representing Representative Ron Kind, Joe Folsom, Executive Director, Pierce County Economic Development Corporation, Roxie Anderson, Monroe County Planner, Mara Keyes, WWBIC Regional Project Director - Southwest, and Francis Schelfhout, WI DOT. The attendance roster is attached.

**Minutes of October 13, 2021, Bimonthly Meeting**

Chairman Kuhn asked for a motion on the October 13, 2021, bimonthly meeting minutes. Commissioner Twidt made a motion to approve the October 13, 2021, bimonthly meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Carney. 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 October 31, 2021, ending balance in all accounts was \$340,590.11 and the November 30, 2021, ending balance was \$357,720.95. She reported the beginning balance on October 1, 2021, in all Revolving Loan Fund accounts was \$1,206,827.28 and the ending balance on November 30, 2021, was \$1,212,989.40. Commissioner Twidt made a motion to approve the treasurer's report as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Schroeder. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments hearing none the Treasurer's Report was unanimously approved.

**Presentation by Mark Tallman, Regional Representative – Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC).**

Mr. Tallman presented the different programs that the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) has to offer communities and new and growing businesses in Wisconsin. He highlighted in his presentation the three areas where WEDC can support communities: Business Development and Attraction, Community Development, and International Development. He emphasized the importance of communities maintaining an up-to-date comprehensive plan in order to be prepared to apply for available WEDC grants.

**CEDS Update Goals and Strategies**

Mr. Bonifas reviewed the five goals that were established at the previous bimonthly meetings and presented the changes and additions to the strategies that were suggested from the last meeting under each goal to create the final goals and strategies to be included in the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. Changes to the introduction were: The following goals and strategies will be used by the MRRPC for the purpose of fostering regional economic development in our region to improve the region's environment, economy, and quality of life.

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Goal 1 Strategy additions –

- Support Alternative Fuel Corridors throughout the region.
- Support Electric Vehicle (EV) and Connected Automated Vehicle (CAV) infrastructure in the region.
- Support solar power projects in the region.
- Support and assist with transportation corridor planning.
- Support the design and implementation of the TCMC (second daily Amtrak Train).
- Support public infrastructure projects that minimize community risks from severe climate-related events, such as flooding, drought and other severe weather situations.

Goal 1 Strategy change:

- ~~Encourage one more Amtrak train a day both ways between Chicago and Minneapolis.~~ Support the design and implementation of the TCMC (second daily Amtrak Train).

Goal 2 Strategy additions –

- Establish data on regional workforce gaps.
- Work with businesses/ municipalities and other State and Federal agencies to assist immigrants to fill workforce gaps.

Goal 3 Strategy additions:

- Work with the and support the Universities of La Crosse and River Falls Small Business Development Centers.

Goal 3 Strategy change:

- Link tours to products offered in the region.
  - Food: wineries, apples, orchards, cranberries, micro-breweries, vegetables, meats, and cheese
  - Organic Industry
  - Products: computer control devices, circuit boards, HVAC equipment, furniture, cabinetry, compound bows, guitars, fabricated metals.

Goal 4 Strategy additions:

- Attend Towns Association Meetings

Goals 5 Strategy additions:

- Support the Flyway Trail (Buffalo County).
- Encourage and assist businesses to address child care needs.

### **Decision on Town of Onalaska Comprehensive Plan Contract.**

Ms. Nicewander reported that the Town of Onalaska has asked the commission to complete an update of their comprehensive plan. The contract would begin December of 2021 and conclude with the adoption of their revised plan in September 2022. She said the cost of the plan would be \$12,000 with \$6,000 from the Town and \$6,000 being matched by the Commission. Commissioner Schnitzler made a motion to approve the contract between the Town of Onalaska and the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission to complete the update to the Town of Onalaska's Comprehensive Plan. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Twidt. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments. Commissioner Borreson asked if the plan was created from a blank outline. Ms. Nicewander replied that the plan is an update of an existing plan so some of the information is there and just needs to be updated. Commissioner Schmidt asked if there is a Zoom option to attend public meetings for the plan. Ms. Nicewander replied that there is a Zoom option to attend meetings and is posted on their website. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any other comments and hearing none the motion was unanimously approved.

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

Mr. Bonifas reported that he has been working collaboratively with other planning groups to apply for 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). Mr. Bonifas said that the application for the first phase of the grant is for a feasibility study for \$500,000. He said that application has been submitted and the finalists will be announced on January 10<sup>th</sup>. He said that there were 519 applicants nationwide for the grant. 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 Sidie Hollow Lake and other park upgrades 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. He said that they have begun phase 1 of their plan along the river. They have begun to implement some of their engineering designs and creating a riverfront hiking trail.

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### **WEDC Mainstreet Bounce Back Grants**

Mr. Bonifas reported that the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (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 there have been over 300 inquiries about the grant. We have received 154 completed applications and awarded 102 \$10,000 grants. There are 44 applications that are under review. There have been applications from every county in our region. The grants are on a first come first serve basis. The grant cycle will end June 30, 2022, or when the funds are depleted.

### **CARES Act Supplemental Funding**

**Website Upgrade:** Mr. Bonifas reported that the website upgrade is completed, and businesses can apply for revolving loan funds through the new website.

**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](http://www.mrrpc.com). He said the in person attendance has been low and sometimes those sessions have had to be cancelled due to Zoom only registrations. He said that this Spring the webinars will be advertised and promoted to increase attendance. The webinars are free of charge to businesses.

**Location Based data acquisition project:** Mr. Gollnik reported that he is talking with local communities and counties about how the Location Based Data can be used for economic development and planning. Mr. Gollnik said that one of the requests he has had involved creating a snapshot look at Pepin County traffic to research the impacts of tourism and he said that he is also working with a Recreation Working Group and the DNR. He said that he is looking for groups who would like to use the data for their projects.

**SMRT Bus Marketing Plan:** Mr. Gollnik reported Vendi Advertising is nearing completion of their marketing plan for the SMRT Bus and has produced additional marketing materials to use in the next months to promote the SMRT Bus to different groups.

**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 reports are being shared with economic development groups in each county and can be accessed on the webpage at [www.mrrpc.com](http://www.mrrpc.com).

**Revolving Loan Fund:** Mr. Bonifas reported that the CARES Act Revolving Loan Fund began with \$1,050,000 to loan out to area businesses. The funds were divided into the three regions of our original revolving loan fund areas with each area being allotted approximately \$350,000. The Business Capital Fund has made 4 loans totaling \$351,000 and \$5400 remaining, CMV Growth Development Fund has made two loans totaling \$234,000 with \$92,000 left to loan out in their region, La Crosse County has made 2 loans totaling \$75,000 and a \$150,000 loan pending, and they have \$141,000 left to loan out. He said that there has been \$660,000 loaned out with a \$150,000 loan pending. There is \$240,000 remaining to be loan out. He said that we have until the end of June 2022 to loan the rest of the money out to businesses.

### **BUILD Grant update.**

Mr. Gollnik reported that of the RFPs that had been sent out 3 proposals have been returned from international firms that specialize in this type of work. There will be an advisory panel from WISDOT, the Federal review board, and area agencies that will be reviewing the consultants and selecting a firm. He said that once the consultant is selected, he would like to create a larger panel to be part of the process.

### **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, Readstown, and Viola have all approved their plans and now are working towards plan implementation. 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. The grant is set for completion on December 31<sup>st</sup>.

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

Ms. Nicewander reported that the City of Westby is moving forward with the construction of their industrial park. She said that they have used about 40 percent of the funds and at the end of the month they will have used between 50 to 60 percent of the funds. She said that now they are putting in a new lift station, constructing a stormwater pond, and getting ready to lay gas lines, and grading for road construction.

### Reports from Commissioners.

Commissioner Burke reported that the La Crosse County Board has been deciding which areas of concern they would like to focus on with the ARPA funds which includes homelessness, child care, stormwater control, energy and long range planning. Commission Schnitzler reported that Monroe County is developing a list of items to use their ARPA funds within the county. Some possible uses would include broadband, land conservation, and a new nursing home. Commissioner Schroeder reported that in Pierce County the board has appointed an ad hoc committee to review different options for the funds. Commissioner Krachey reported that Crawford County is looking at expanding access to broadband in the county. Commissioner McMillan Urell in Buffalo County reported that the board is gathering information about possible uses for the funds such as broadband expansion.

### 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

MRRPC Bimonthly Meeting Attendees	
Name	Representing
Del Twidt	Buffalo County
Mary Anne McMillan Urell	Buffalo County
John Schlesselman	Buffalo County
Gerald Krachey	Crawford County
Ron Carney	Jackson County
Brad Chown	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
Toni Wissestad	Monroe County
Bill Schroeder	Pierce County
Neil Gulbranson	Pierce County
Richard Purdy	Pierce County
Chris Kees Winkler	Pepin County
Phillip Borreson	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
Francis Schelfhout	Wisconsin Dept. of Transportation
Roxie Anderson	Monroe County Planner
Joe Folsom	Director, Pierce County Economic Development Corp
Mara Keyes	WWBIC Regional Project Director – Southwest
Mark Tallman	WEDC