

**Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission Staff Report on Projects for the Bimonthly Meeting on 12.8.2021**

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 <sup>st</sup> , 2020 through June 30 <sup>th</sup> , 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; completed the website upgrade; began small business webinars; received EMSI Covid-19 Impact report; and completed dashboard for the Location Based Data project. See information below for details on the Small Business Webinars and the website development. Began researching how to incorporate pandemic resiliency into CEDS.</p>	Dave Bonifas Director 608.785.9396 <a href="mailto:dave@mrrpc.com">dave@mrrpc.com</a>
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 or 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 8 loans totaling \$660,000 or 63% of the total amount available has been approved. One business is located in Durand, one in Taylor, one in the city of La Crosse, one in Hagar City, one in Nelson, one in Crawford County, one in Vernon County and one in the City of Onalaska. In addition, we currently have 1 application pending.</p>	Dave Bonifas Director 608.785.9396 <a href="mailto:dave@mrrpc.com">dave@mrrpc.com</a>

			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.	
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	MRRPC contracted with DigiSage to both update our website and to conduct the webinars. DigiSage completed the website upgrade, and course outlines, schedules, and strategy have been agreed upon, in coordination with the UWL Small Business Center for the small business webinars. The Small Business webinars titled “Win the Web began in September. The first in person webinars were held in La Crosse on September 8 <sup>th</sup> , followed by Monroe County on September 17 <sup>th</sup> , and Pierce County on September 20 <sup>th</sup> . In addition, 2 online sessions were also held on September 28 <sup>th</sup> and October 5 <sup>th</sup> . Other dates for webinars and what they will teach can be found on our website.	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 continues to work with Vendi to provide background information and the project is aligning with work being done for the LAPC Transit Development Plan.  Vendi is also assisting staff to strategize and develop materials to pursue funding from public and private agencies in the region. Package of graphics, deliverables, and PowerPoint distributed in late September. Vendi is currently developing additional materials with excess budget.	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 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 was received in late June, and MRRPC staff has begun meeting with agencies to identify applications opportunities for applying the data throughout the region.  Preliminary analyses were presented at the Bi-State MPO/RPC conference in September 2021. Staff continues to explore options to apply the data and has spoken with additional users.	Bob Gollnik Senior Planner 608.785.9396 <a href="mailto:bob@mrrpc.com">bob@mrrpc.com</a>
MRRPC Build Grant	MRRPC submitted a planning grant proposal to USDOT in May 2020 to	Anticipated start date:	Staff is working with Federal Highway Administration and WisDOT through the	Bob Gollnik Senior Planner

	<p>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>January 15,2022</p>	<p>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 FHWA and USDOT staff. FHWA/USDOT approved administrative agreements in late September and gave a NTP to MRRPC. RFP will be released October 8.</p> <p>MRRPC Received 3 proposals which are being reviewed by a selection committee comprised of MRRPC staff and key regional officials. An advisory committee is also being formed to oversee project milestones.</p>	<p>608.785.9396 bob@mrrpc.com</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. The villages have begun applying for State and Federal grants to implement their plan. All of the villages have spent their total amount of grant money.</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</p>	<p>Westby’s grant application was submitted on Grants.Gov on October 3,2019. Requested additional information was submitted</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 16<sup>th</sup>. The bid opening date was April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Westby is recommending Badger Environmental and Earthworks, Inc. to selected. They were the</p>	<p>Abbey Nicewander Planner 608.785.9396 abbey@mrrpc.com</p>

	wastewater treatment facility that will use an anaerobic 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.	on November 30, 2019.	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.  Construction continues on the industrial park. MRRPC staff is working with the City to administer grant money and required documentation accordingly.	
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. Updates have been made to the existing land use map and future land use map is in development. A public survey was sent out and is due in November. An update is being made to existing conditions portion of the plan. Plan Commission and MRRPC are determining future land use projections with La Crosse County.	Abbey Nicewander Planner 608.785.9396 <a href="mailto:abbey@mrrpc.com">abbey@mrrpc.com</a>
T. Hamilton Comprehensive Plan Update	In October 2020, the Town of Hamilton signed a contract to update its Comprehensive Plan with MRRPC.	November 2020 – November 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.  Draft final chapters were distributed to the planning committee in August and new versions will be submitted in December. A full final plan should be reviewed by the committee in December and January.	Bob Gollnik Senior Planner 608.785.9396 <a href="mailto:bob@mrrpc.com">bob@mrrpc.com</a>
T. Farmington Comprehensive Plan Update	In March 2021, the Town of Farmington signed a contract with MRRPC to update its Comprehensive Plan.	March 2021 – December 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, and the committee reviewed final goals and objectives in September, along with available existing condition data. A draft final plan will be distributed to planning committee members in December 2021.	Bob Gollnik Senior Planner 608.785.9396 <a href="mailto:bob@mrrpc.com">bob@mrrpc.com</a>
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-December 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	Abbey Nicewander Planner 608.785.9396 <a href="mailto:abbey@mrrpc.com">abbey@mrrpc.com</a>

			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.	
New Outdoor Recreation Plan Update Requests	Pierce County, Trempealeau County, Pepin County, Jackson 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's plan is in the draft stage and was reviewed in late October. Draft is going to Count Board for approval next week. 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 with a draft completed in late October. Awaiting Jackson County comments for draft approval.	Abbey Nicewander Planner 608.785.9396 <a href="mailto:abbey@mrrpc.com">abbey@mrrpc.com</a>
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 <sup>th</sup> . MRRPC staff has updated demographic data, storm events, and maps in the plan. A second round of survey results was received. MRRPC has met with County departments to review department goals. A draft of the plan is being review by County staff. A public hearing was held and a draft plan went to WEM for approval.	Abbey Nicewander Planner 608.785.9396 <a href="mailto:abbey@mrrpc.com">abbey@mrrpc.com</a>
Scenic Mississippi Regional Transit (SMRT) bus serving Crawford, Vernon, Monroe, and La Crosse counties	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.  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.	Service Began on December 3, 2012 - present	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.  On July 19, 2019, The SMRT Bus system was awarded \$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	Bob Gollnik Senior Planner 608.785.9396 <a href="mailto:bob@mrrpc.com">bob@mrrpc.com</a>

			<p>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>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 <a href="mailto:bob@mrrpc.com">bob@mrrpc.com</a></p>
Mainstreet Bounce Back Grant	<p>WEDC contracted with the MRRPC to administer a Mainstreet Bounceback Grant. These are \$10,000 grants to businesses which opened up or expanded into vacant commercial properties in 2021.</p>	August 2021 – June 2022 or earlier if grant money allotted runs out.	Staff has been serving as the administrator for this grant. We receive the applications and verify the information supplied on the application. If approved a \$10,000 check will be written out to the business. In addition, we have been receiving numerous inquiries daily regarding the grant. The MRRPC region has been approved for \$1,950,000 in grant money.	<p>Dave Bonifas Director 608.785.9396 <a href="mailto:dave@mrrpc.com">dave@mrrpc.com</a></p>