



**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., February 9, 2022
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: Andy Banasik, Prairie du Chien Area School District, Peter Fletcher, Executive Director La Crosse Area MPO, Jackie Eastwood, La Crosse Area MPO – Transportation Planner, Gregg Wavruneck, Representing Senator Tammy Baldwin, Joe Folsom, Executive Director, Pierce County Economic Development Corporation, Mike Kornmann, Trempealeau County Land Management, Mara Keyes, WWBIC Regional Project Director - Southwest, and Francis Schelfhout, WI DOT. The attendance roster is attached.

Minutes of December 8, 2021, Bimonthly Meeting

Chairman Kuhn asked for a motion on the December 8, 2021, bimonthly meeting minutes. Commissioner Twidt made a motion to approve the December 8, 2021, bimonthly meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Pelock. 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 December 31, 2021, ending balance in all accounts was \$329,725.80 and the January 31, 2022, ending balance was \$338,664.97. She reported the beginning balance on December 1, 2021, in all Revolving Loan Fund accounts was \$1,212,898.40 and the ending balance on January 31, 2022, was \$1,374,585.34. Commissioner Schlesselman 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 Prairie du Chien Area Schools District Administrator, Andy Banasik - preparing our students for the workforce while they are still in high school

Mr. Banasik presented the different programs that are offered to students in the Prairie du Chien Area School District to prepare them for the workforce. He discusses the different partnerships the school district has created with Southwest Wisconsin Technical College, Western Technical College, UW-La Crosse, UW- Platteville, and UW-Madison. He said that these partnerships give the students the opportunity to graduate with Associate Degrees and college credits which fills workforce gaps and makes going to post-secondary schooling more affordable for their high school graduates.

Decision on 2022 Budget

Mr. Bonifas reviewed the 2022 budget. He reviewed the revenue sources that total \$414,897 and expenditures are budgeted for \$414,897. He reported that the Main Street Bounce Back Grant administration was a new source of revenue in 2021 which was not reflected in the 2021 budget. He said that this grant will continue into 2022 ending on June 30, 2022. He explained each budget item for income and expenditures. He said that equipment expenses were larger in anticipation of purchasing a new copy machine because of the age of the machine. He also stated that salaries assume a 2% increase beginning July 1, 2021, but this actual amount would be determined at the April 2022 MRRPC Meeting.

Chairman Kuhn asked for a motion to approve the MRRPC 2022 Budget as presented. Commissioner Pelock made a motion to approve the 2022 MRRPC Budget as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Higgins. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments. Commissioner Kees Winkler asked about the office rent for the commission. Mr. Bonifas replied that the commission rents from a non-profit, the Family and Children's Center, and they have not increased the rent very often over the years which keeps the commission's costs down. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any other questions 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 worked 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 was submitted but was denied and did not make it into the second round but through this grant he was working with the City of Hillsboro to expand their wastewater treatment plant which was part of the DINER application but since it was denied the Hillsboro application will be submitted as a separate application. He said he was working with the consultants, MSA, to complete the application. He said tourism ARPA Grants are being pursued: one with Vernon County, one with the City of Prescott, and City of Prairie du Chien. 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 Freedom Park with their downtown area. He said the City of Prairie du Chien is working on submitting a tourism grant application for Performance Park on St. Feriole Island to create a performance venue.

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 originally 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 500 inquiries about the grant. We have awarded 195 grants to businesses in the region and just received an additional \$1 million dollars to award grants to businesses. 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

Small Business Website Assistance: Mr. Bonifas reported that the Win the Web webinars and in person workshops began in September 2021. 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. He said that the webinars will continue through June 30, 2022. The webinars are free of charge to businesses and businesses can register for the webinars through the commission website.

Location Based data acquisition project: Mr. Gollnik reported that he is continuing to talk with local communities and counties about how the Location Based Data can be used for economic development and planning. Mr. Gollnik said that he has used the data for grant applications.

SMRT Bus Marketing Plan: Mr. Gollnik reported Vendi Advertising has completed the SMRT Bus marketing plan and now they are working on the implementation phase of the plan.

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. All of the regions loaned out their allotted funds. There is \$89,908 remaining to be loaned out and there is a loan application pending for this final amount. He said that we have until the end of June 2022 to loan the rest of the money out to businesses, and we are on track to have all the money lent out by this deadline.

BUILD Grant update.

Mr. Gollnik reported that of the RFPs for the Freight Strategy that had been sent out 3 proposals have been returned from international firms that specialize in this type of work. The advisory panel made up of members from WEDC, WISDOT, and the La Crosse Area MPO, interviewed all three firms and selected SRF Consulting which is based out of Minneapolis. He said this firm has done a lot of work in Wisconsin and Minnesota and are familiar with the La Crosse area and are currently working with the La Crosse Area MPO on a project. He said that the project start date will be March 1st and a presentation will be made at a future commission meeting.

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 plans were then used for plan implementation as long as it was not used for a construction project. The grant was completed on December 31, 2021.

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 construction has been set back due to weather. She said that they have done 6 disbursements of funds which is 59 percent of the award. She said that they are looking to tentatively finish the project at the end of the March but they are dependent on supplies and the weather.

La Crosse County Town Comprehensive Plans Update: T. Shelby, T. Onalaska, T. Hamilton, T. Farmington.

T. Shelby: Ms. Nicewander reported that the Town of Shelby is two-thirds of the way completed with updating the different elements of the plan. She said that they are working very closely with La Crosse County in developing the Land Use part of the plan to see where they will put future development. There are 3 more elements to be updated for the plan with a completion date set for May and then reviewing the draft and scheduling a public hearing for the draft in September.

T. Onalaska: Ms. Nicewander reported that the Town of Onalaska just began the update for their Comprehensive Plan in December and there have been a few meetings between the Town and the County to see how their plan relates to the County Plan. A few draft elements have been revised and their survey has been sent out in January and data is being compiled for the next meeting.

T. Hamilton: Mr. Gollnik reported that the Town of Hamilton approved their plan last night, February 8th, at their meeting.

T. Farmington: Mr. Gollnik reported that the Town of Farmington is reviewing the final draft of their plan and their plan will be going before their board for approval.

West Salem School District TAP Grant.

Mr. Gollnik reported that he is working with the West Salem School District to implement a WisDot program called the TAP Program which stands for Transportation Alternatives Program. This program works with non-motorized transportation. He talked with the District's Superintendent about updating their Safe Routes to School Program to do a traffic study to assist with traffic flow around the school. He said that the project is an 80/20 funded project with WisDot. Mr. Gollnik also reported that the Bi-partisan Transportation Bill has passed and there will be funds that need to be spend in the next five years. He said that he has also been speaking to townships about the bill. It is a local service transportation bill. The bill is designed to improve minor arterials and local township roads to get improvements done quickly and easily. The first round of funding is supposed to be led by shovel ready projects in 2022 for fiscal year 2023. He said that \$200,000 to \$600,000 projects are desirable. He said that the townships have been notified but details have not been released.

Reports from Commissioners

Commissioner Kees Winkler asked if there has been any funding for solar projects. She asked if there are any grants for solar projects for government buildings. Mr. Bonifas replied that he had attended the Wisconsin Counties Association and talked with someone familiar with solar installation. The gentleman he spoke with recommended that the electrical companies would be the best source of information about solar grants. Electrical companies receive incentives for solar projects and will be the most knowledgeable source.

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
Gerald Krachey	Crawford County
Dennis Pelock	Crawford County
Michael Higgins	Crawford County
Ron Carney	Jackson County
Vicki Burke	La Crosse County
Sharon Hampson	La Crosse County
James Kuhn	Monroe County
Bill Schroeder	Pierce County
Neil Gulbranson	Pierce County
Chris Kees Winkler	Pepin County
Phillip Borreson	Trempealeau County
Ernest Vold	Trempealeau County
Nancy Jaekel	Vernon County
Jo Ann Nickelatti	Vernon County
Dave Bonifas	MRRPC Staff
Bob Gollnik	MRRPC Staff
Abbey Nicewander	MRRPC Staff
Sarah Ofte	MRRPC Staff
Gregg Wavruneck	Representing Senator Tammy Baldwin
Peter Fletcher	Director, La Crosse MPO
Jackie Eastwood	Transportation Planner, La Crosse MPO
Francis Schelfhout	Wisconsin Dept. of Transportation
Andy Banasik	Prairie du Chien Area School District – District Administrator
Joe Folsom	Director, Pierce County Economic Development Corp
Mara Keyes	WWBIC Regional Project Director – Southwest
Mike Kornmann	Director of Land Management – Trempealeau County