



**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., April 13, 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: Mara Keyes, WWBIC Regional Project Director – Southwest, Peter Fletcher, Executive Director La Crosse Area MPO, Dave Carlson, Economic Development and Tourism Coordinator – Trempealeau County, Nancy VanderMeer, State Representative, Joe Folsom, Executive Director, Pierce County Economic Development Corporation, Roxie Anderson, Monroe County Land Conservation, Carol Roth, Driftless Development Inc., Tom Cooper, Black River Falls Downtown Business Association, Mike Temp, Tostrud and Temp S.C., and LeAnna Bender, Pepin County Economic Development Planner. The attendance roster is attached.

Minutes of February 9, 2022, Bimonthly Meeting

Chairman Kuhn asked for a motion on the February 9, 2022, bimonthly meeting minutes. Commissioner Twidt made a motion to approve the February 9, 2022, 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 February 28, 2022, ending balance in all accounts was \$442,279.33 and the March 31, 2022, ending balance was \$476,720.85. She reported the beginning balance on February 1, 2022, in all Revolving Loan Fund accounts was \$1,374,585.34 and the ending balance on March 31, 2022, was \$1,121,292.38. Commissioner Schmidt made a motion to approve the treasurer's report as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Schlesselman. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments hearing none the Treasurer's Report was unanimously approved.

Presentation on 2021 Audit by Mike Temp, CPA, Tostrud and Temp S.C.

Mike Temp of Tostrud and Temp S.C. said his firm prepared the 2021 Financial Statements and Independent Auditors report for the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission (MRRPC). He referenced the independent auditor's report on page which states that there were no significant findings when preparing the audit and there were no disagreements with management. He referenced the opinion on page 5 of the audit which was an unmodified opinion and he said that it is what you want to have. He referenced Page 8 which gives comparisons to other fiscal years. He said page 10 is the Statement of Net Position which is a snapshot of the Commission's position on December 31, 2021. Mr. Temp then reviewed the 2021 Statement of Net Position, Statement of Activities, the 2021 Balance Sheet, and the Reconciliation for Governmental Funds. He also reviewed the balance sheets for the six different revolving loan funds. Mr. Temp opened the floor for questions. Commissioner Borreson recommended that the items on page 64 should be shared with the counties of all the work that the commission has done.

Providing Planning and Economic Development Services to Improve the Environment, Economy and Quality of life
•Land Use Planning and Zoning Assistance • Transportation Planning • Economic Development Planning • Recreation Planning • Business Lending • Grant Writing • Economic Data Dissemination • Assisting Local Interests in Responding to State, Federal and Private Programs • Advisory Services on Planning and Development Issues • Coordinator for Programs and Activities • Advocate on Issues Affecting the Region

Decision to accept 2021 MRRPC Audit

Chairman Kuhn asked if anyone had any questions regarding audit. A motion was made by Commissioner Twidt to accept the 2021 MRRPC Audit as presented seconded by Commissioner McMillen Urell. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions and hearing none the motion was approved.

Presentation by Mara Keyes – Regional Project Director Wisconsin Women’s Business Initiative Corporation (WWBIC)

Mara Keyes, Regional Project Director Wisconsin Director Wisconsin Women’s Business Initiative Corporation (WWBIC) gave a presentation about the different programs WWBIC provides to small business owners such as small business consulting, classes and webinars, and loans and grants to help businesses and entrepreneurs. She said that their offices are located next to Valley View Mall.

Decision on the Executive and Administrative Committee’s recommendation on 2022 staff wage adjustments and 2023 County Contributions.

Commissioner Burke reported that the Executive and Administration Committee met on March 24th at the Hampton Inn conference room in La Crosse. She reported that during the meeting a motion was made and seconded to recommend a 2.0% wage increase for the Director Dave Bonifas, Senior Planner Abbey Nicewander, Senior Planner Bob Gollnik and Administrative Assistant Sarah Ofte effective July 1, 2022, and a one-time payment of \$600 to each employee for exceptional performance award. She said it was for the extra work required of the commission during COVID and extra awards from the Federal Government. Commissioner Schmidt made a motion to approve the Executive and Administration Committee’s recommendation of a 2% increase for the Director Dave Bonifas, Senior Planner Abbey Nicewander, Senior Planner Bob Gollnik, and Administrative Assistant Sarah Ofte effective July 1, 2022, and a one-time payment of \$600 to each employee. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Twidt. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments hearing none the motion was approved.

Commissioner Burke reported that the Executive and Administration Committee’s recommendation for 2023 County Contributions was \$141,835 which is last year’s contributions of \$139,392 plus \$2,443 which is half of the raise for staff salaries equaling \$141,835. This amount is based on a .000498118% rate of 2021 real property equalized values. A motion was made by Commissioner Burke to approve the 2023 county contributions totaling \$141,835. Commissioner Twidt seconded the motion. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments and hearing none the motion was approved.

Decision on Executive and Administration Committee’s recommendation on Personnel Policy Change – Maternity Leave.

Dave Bonifas stated that the current MRRPC personal policy manual does not match the Federal “Family Medical Leave Act” (FMLA). The current MRRPC personal policy manual only lists “Maternity Leave”. He reported that the MRRPC receives federal funding each year and should be in compliance with the Federal leave policies. The FMLA addresses not only maternity but also paternity, adoption, care of an employee’s spouse, child or parent, and military caregiver leave. The existing maternity leave allows employees 6-8 weeks after the birth of a baby. The FMLA allows up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave within a 12-month period for family and medical reasons and up to 26 weeks for military caregiver leave. Employees must use their accumulated sick time prior to going on unpaid leave and these sick days count toward the accumulated leave time. In addition, employees are responsible for paying the employee’s share of the health and life insurance premiums during this leave time. A motion was made by Commissioner Borreson and seconded by Commissioner Gulbranson to remove “Maternity Leave” from the MRRPC Personnel Policy Manual VII Wages, Classifications and Benefits (D) Leave and replace it with:

Family Medical Leave – Family Medical Leave entitles eligible employees to take unpaid, job-protected leave for specified family and medical reasons with continuation of group health insurance coverage under the same terms and conditions as if the employee had not taken leave. Eligible employees are entitled to:

- a. Twelve workweeks of leave in a 12-month period for:
 - the birth of a child and to care for the newborn child within one year of birth;
 - the placement with the employee of a child for adoption or foster care and to care for the newly placed child within one year of placement;
 - to care for the employee’s spouse, child, or parent who has a serious health condition;
 - a serious health condition that makes the employee unable to perform the essential functions of his or her job;
 - any qualifying exigency arising out of the fact that the employee’s spouse, child, or parent is a covered
 - military member on “covered active duty;” **or**

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- b. Twenty-six workweeks of leave during a single 12-month period to care for a covered servicemember with a serious injury or illness if the eligible employee is the servicemember's spouse, child, parent or next of kin (military caregiver leave).

Job protected leave for specified family and medical reasons is limited to 12 workweeks and military caregiver leave is limited to twenty-six workweeks for any 12-month period. Employees must use accumulated sick leave prior to going on unpaid leave. Use of sick leave counts toward the workweeks of leave. Employees on unpaid leave are required to continue paying the employee's share of health and life insurance premiums.

The motion was approved.

Report and public comment on the MRRPC's 2022-2027 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

Mr. Bonifas reported that the draft Comprehensive Economic Development Plan (CEDS) was posted on the commission's website to fulfill the public comment requirement for people to leave comments on the plan and the goals. He said he also sent it to area economic development planners for them to comment on the strategy. He said that he has received some suggestions and has made those changes which were grammatical in nature.

Decision on Adoption of Resolution 20220413-1. (Adopting the MRRPC's 2022-2027 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)).

A motion was made by Commissioner Burke to approve Resolution 20220413-1 to adopt the MRRPC's 2022-2027 Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) seconded by Commissioner Schlesselman. Chairman Kuhn asked if there was any discussion and hearing none the motion was approved.

Decision on MRRPC being the Non-Federal sponsor for the Northern Grain Belt Port and Terminal Port Statistical Area.

Mr. Gollnik reported that a group from Illinois has been in the process of designating a port statistical area in the upper portion of the Mississippi River and the terminals in the area. He said that it is a process where we can designate 200 miles of the Mississippi River and all its terminals within the area. It covers 7 of our counties and 4 counties on the Minnesota side of the river. It is a federal administrative process where we can draw a line and designate the area as a port statistical area and count all the tonnage and port activity as a federal designated port. It will help us when competing for grants for environmental grants and dam work. It also assists our businesses with marketing. If this was in place, we would rank in the top 50 ports in the country. He said that the process to move forward is to have each of the 11 counties in that designated area sign a resolution in support. This requires a non-federal sponsor. He said that he and Peter Fletcher from the La Crosse Area MPO have been in discussions with the Army Corps of Engineers, the Harbor Commission, and La Crosse County. He said that the support is not financial. After discussion a motion was made by Commissioner Borreson to approve the MRRPC as serving as the Non-Federal Sponsor for the Northern Grain Belt Port and Terminal Port Statistical Area and seconded by Commissioner Nickelatti. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any discussion hearing none the motion was approved.

WEDC Mainstreet Bounce Back Grants

Mr. Bonifas reported that the commission was originally granted \$2 million dollars for the WEDC Main Street Bounce Back Grant program which has been awarded and then was granted an additional \$1 million dollars which will be awarded. He said that there have been over 600 inquiries about the grant, 237 grants have been awarded to date but there are still other applications to process, and we are waiting for additional funds from the State. He said that the State has notified us and has committed funds through June 30, 2022.

BUILD Grant update.

Mr. Gollnik reported that he has been working with the consultant for the BUILD Grant. He said that there is a kick off meeting this afternoon. A steering committee has been assembled including a commission member from the board. He said that at the next commission meeting he will have a presentation. In the next two months outreach will begin to the local businesses and shipping companies.

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. He said that he is working on a traffic study and a Safe Routes to School Program with the school district. He said that there are still funds available for other schools in the area and to contact him with ideas. He said that the minimum grant is \$50,000.

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Final update on the EDA grant to fund economic recovery planning for the communities of Ontario, La Farge, Viola and Readstown

Mr. Bonifas reported that the work for the grant and plans were completed December 31, 2021, and all the final reports have been submitted. He said that the Village of Readstown has identified two primary locations within the village to resettle, the Village of Viola has identified four different sites, the Village of La Farge has identified three different sites, and the Village of Ontario has identified two different sites. These sites were identified through public participation and through the planning process as sites where construction and new businesses could go to get out of the flood plain. It is geared to mostly commercial land but is also identified as residential. He said that the communities are now working on implementing the plan and moving forward.

Commissioner's questions and comments on the projects or subjects listed in the written staff report

Commissioner Nickelatti asked about the progress of the Westby EDA Industrial Park. Ms. Nicewander responded that 51 percent of the funding has been spent on the project. Some construction had been stopped due to the weather. Commissioner Nickelatti asked about businesses moving into the new space. Ms. Nicewander responded that there needed to be a certain number of committed businesses to move into the industrial park during the grant writing process.

New Business and Adjourn

Chairman Kuhn asked if there was any new business. Mr. Bonifas reported that all of the CARES RLF Funds have been lent out and it was a very equitable distribution across the region. 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
Brad Chown	Jackson County
Vicki Burke	La Crosse County
Robin Schmidt	La Crosse County
James Kuhn	Monroe County
Bill Schroeder	Pierce County
Neil Gulbranson	Pierce County
James Kraft	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
Mike Temp	Tostrud & Temp SC
Peter Fletcher	Director, La Crosse MPO
Roxie Anderson	Monroe County Land Conservation
Nancy VanderMeer	State of Wisconsin Representative
Carol Roth	Driftless Development
Joe Folsom	Director, Pierce County Economic Development Corp
Mara Keyes	WWBIC Regional Project Director – Southwest
Dave Carlson	Economic Development & Tourism Coordinator - Trempealeau County
LeAnna Bender	Pepin County Economic Development Coordinator
Tom Cooper	Black River Falls Downtown Association