



**MISSISSIPPI RIVER
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION**

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*Eugene Savage, Black River Falls, WI
Chairman*
*James Scholmeier, Fountain City, WI
Vice Chairman*
*Vicki Burke, Onalaska, WI
Secretary & Treasurer*
*Greg Flogstad, Onalaska, WI
Director*

**MINUTES
MISSISSIPPI RIVER REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION (MRRPC)
BIMONTHLY MEETING
10:00 a.m., April 14, 2010
River Jacks, 1835 Rose Street, La Crosse, WI 54603**

Call to Order

Chairman Savage called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. and asked for the roll call. Greg Flogstad, Director of the MRRPC took roll and said a quorum was present. The attendance roster is attached.

Guests in attendance: Matt Nikolay representing U.S. Senator Feingold; John Medinger representing U.S. Senator Kohl; Charles Weeth, Citizens for a Scenic Wisconsin; and Jake Stansfield, UW-L Intern.

Minutes of February 10, 2010 Bimonthly Meeting

Commissioner Ehrens made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Murray, to accept the minutes of the February 10, 2010, bimonthly meeting. Approved unanimously.

Treasurer's Report

Chairman Savage asked Secretary-Treasurer Burke to present the treasurers reports. Ms. Burke said that on the January 31, 2010 Treasurer's report the payroll number was incorrect and should be increased by \$16.20. This adjustment would change the cash on hand at the end of January from \$270,969.49 to \$270,953.29. Ms. Burke continued by reviewing the activity on the MRRPC treasurer's reports from February 2010 through March 2010. Ms. Burke said the February 1, 2010 balance in all MRRPC accounts was \$270,953.29 and the February 28, 2010 ending balance was \$292,725.61. Ms. Burke reported that the beginning balance in March 2010 was \$292,725.61 and the balance in all accounts at month's end was \$274,708.60.

Ms. Burke then presented the financial report for the Business Capital Fund. The balance in this account as of January 31, 2010 was \$148,812.57. From February 2010 through March 2010, activity in this account included loan repayments of \$26,229.19 and account interest of \$132.26. The ending balance in the Business Capital Fund as of March 31, 2010, was \$175,174.02. Ms. Burke said that as of January 31, 2010, the Business Capital Fund II RLF had a balance of \$52,966.06. She said that from February 2010 through March 2010, interest on this account totaled \$44.19 and loan repayments of \$4,635.37 were made, leaving a March 31, 2010, balance of \$57,645.62.

The CMV Growth Development Fund began with a January 12, 2010, balance of \$55,069.47. Ms. Burke said that from the period of January 13, 2010, through March 9, 2010, interest earned on this account totaled \$12.74, loan payments of \$1,155.02 were made, and \$596 was transferred to CMV Sequester Account leaving a March 9, 2010, balance of \$55,641.23. Ms. Burke said the balance in the CMV-EDA Sequestered Fund as of January 12, 2010, was \$146,554.09. During the period of January 31, 2010, through March 9, 2010, activity in this account consisted of interest earned of \$33.82, a \$596 deposit (transfer of funds from CMV RLF Account), and a payment of \$46.51 to the U.S. Treasury leaving a balance of \$147,137.40.

Ms. Burke said the La Crosse County Economic Development Fund began with a January 13, 2010 balance of \$42,888.45. During the period of January 14, 2010 through March 14, 2010, loan repayments of \$1,850.00 were made and interest earned totaled \$14.39. The ending account balance as of March 14, 2010, was \$44,752.84. Chairman Savage asked for a motion of approval on the treasurers reports presented. Commissioner Murray made a motion to approve the treasurer's reports as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Nickelatti and approved unanimously.

Bryan Law, MRRPC's Economic Development Planner passed around a sample report that provided a snapshot of loans in the Business Capital 2 revolving loan fund. Mr. Law said the report was produced using Portfol software, a software package purchased by the MRRPC to manage the revolving loan funds the MRRPC administers. Mr. Law said the software should help with year-end reporting on the revolving loan funds.

Mr. Law said there was no loan activity since the last bimonthly meeting. Mr. Law said funds are available in all four revolving loan funds for lending. He said if anyone was aware of businesses that need funds for start-up or expansion to let him know.

Decision on MRRPC 2009 Audit

Director Flogstad introduced Mike Temp from the accounting firm of Tostrud and Temp, SC. Mr. Temp said his firm prepared the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission's 2009 Financial Statements and Independent Auditor's Report. He briefly reviewed Government Auditing Standards and OMB Circular A-133. He referred to page 4, the Independent Auditor's Report and opinion on the MRRPC's financial statements. The opinion read "In our opinion, the financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the respective financial position of the governmental activities, the component units, each major fund and the aggregate remaining fund information of the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission as of December 31, 2009, and the respective changes in financial position thereof for the year then ended, in conformity with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America."

Mr. Temp said page 6 of the audit provides a laymen's synopsis of the year, an overall review of financial activities for the fiscal year. He then referred to page 8, the Statement of Net Assets that includes a snapshot of net assets and liabilities of the Commission as of 12/31/2009. He said the Commission finished the year with an adequate surplus of funds. He then reviewed the Statement of Activities on page 9. He explained that some activities are not covered by grants or contracts, but are covered by county contributions and interest income, etc. He said there was a positive change of \$26,479 to net assets in 2009 using the business type of accounting format. He said page 12 was the Statement of Revenues, Expenditures, and Changes in Fund Balance Governmental Funds for 12/31/2009. He pointed out that this accounting format showed excess revenues in 2009 of \$29,602, however the Commission paid off their Wisconsin Retirement Fund Unfunded Liability of \$27,021. This payoff left excess funds for the year of \$2,581.

Mr. Temp said page 14 of the audit was a Statement of Net Assets for the four revolving loan funds the MRRPC administers. He said these assets are restricted and can only be used for lending purposes. Mr. Temp said page 15 outlines activities in the four revolving loan funds in 2009 and page 26 includes additional footnotes on the RLF financial statements. Mr. Temp said page 29 of the audit provides a comparison of revenues and expenditures and of what was budgeted and what actually occurred. Mr. Temp said that no problems were found by the auditors and if any were found the Commission would have been notified.

Mr. Temp said all Commissioners should have received a management letter with the audit that included two items the Commission could do differently. One recommendation was to maintain a double entry accounting system on the revolving loan funds. Mr. Flogstad said the new RLF accounting software should address this. Mr. Temp said the other recommendation was that the bookkeeping accounting firm or Treasurer compare vendors and dollar amounts from the cancelled checks with the check register. Mr. Flogstad said he had already talked to the bookkeeping accounting firm and they will check and initial the vouchers each month.

Commissioner Johnson asked about the threshold listed on Page 49. Mr. Temp explained that if you have more than \$500,000 on hand you need to have an A133 audit. Commissioner Savage asked if the \$27,021 payment made to the Employee Trust

Funds for the unfunded liability was a onetime shot. Mr. Temp said yes that was the case. Mr. Flogstad asked Mr. Temp to comment on what types of cash the MRRPC should have available. Mr. Temp said there isn't a standard but generally speaking you need to have some cushion. He said a normal benchmark amount would probably be 3-6 months because of ebbs and flows of income and expenses. Commissioner Johnson said the MRRPC relies on government monies and these are tenuous times. Mr. Temp added it's better to be on the high side. Chairman Savage thanked Mr. Temp for attending the meeting and presenting the audit.

Commissioner Burke made a motion to approve the proposed 2009 Financial Statement and Independent Auditor's Report. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Scholmeier and approved unanimously.

Decision on Executive and Administration Committee Recommendations on Staff Salary Adjustments and 2011 County Contributions

Chairman Savage asked Commissioner Burke to report on the Executive and Administration Meeting held on March 23, 2010. Commissioner Burke reported that after taking into consideration a telephone survey of wage settlements of counties in the region, the Executive and Administration Committee was recommending that all MRRPC staff members receive a 2% annual raise effective 07/01/2010. Ms. Burke said if this salary increase is approved it would increase staff salaries by \$4,642 annually. Ms. Burke said the Executive Committee was also recommending that the Commission reduce its county contribution rate from .0006763% to .000649055% for 2011, which would result in a funding decrease from \$139,809 to \$135,285, a reduction of \$4,524. Mr. Flogstad said with this reduction no county would pay more in county contributions that they did in 2010, and most counties would see a reduction in their contribution amount.

Commissioner Johnson questioned how the 2% salary increase would ultimately affect the MRRPC budget taking into consideration fringe benefits. Some discussion occurred regarding the recommended salary increase and the fringe benefit rate. Mike Temp said the fringe benefit rate includes items that aren't affected by salary increases such as health and life insurance. Mr. Flogstad stated that contract revenue or additional grant revenue is expected to create a balanced budget and positive cash flow for the Commission. Chairman Savage called for a motion on the recommendations by the Executive and Administration Committee on 2010 staff salary increases and 2011 county contributions. Commissioner George Baker made a motion to approve both recommendations. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Christenson, and approved unanimously.

Presentation on Designation of 114 Miles of State Highway 33 and 136 as a State Scenic Byway by Charles Weeth, Citizens for a Scenic Wisconsin

Charles Weeth said he is the part-time Executive Director for Citizen's for a Scenic Wisconsin. He explained that Citizens for a Scenic Wisconsin is proposing a Scenic Byway status of State Highway 33 & 136 from Portage to La Crosse. He said the proposed route includes sections of highway in Vernon, Monroe and La Crosse counties in the MRRPC region. Mr. Weeth said if anyone wants additional information on Citizen's for a Scenic Wisconsin, visit the website: www.scenicwisconsin.org.

Mr. Weeth said Wisconsin is a beautiful State and most of us were born and raised here and stay here because of the quality of life. Mr. Weeth said the Great River Road was the only designated scenic byway in the State until last year when the Lower Wisconsin River Road Scenic Byway was designated. He said the Great River Road is 2,069 miles in length and extends from Mississippi and Louisiana through Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky, Missouri, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota. The Lower Wisconsin River Road Scenic Byway extends from STH Hwy 60 in Lodi, Wisconsin to Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin.

Mr. Weeth said in 1999 Wisconsin Act 9 was enacted to address issues in developing and administering a State Scenic Byways Program. The law directed the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) to develop and administer a state Scenic Byways program. Mr. Weeth said the Scenic Byways Program is a cooperative effort between local communities and WisDOT to identify and promote state highway corridors with scenic and/or historical attributes that provide travelers an enjoyable visual, educational and recreational experience. He said scenic byways encourage tourism and support economic development in communities along the byway. He said that scenic byways also promote partnerships between local governments, business groups, civic groups, and community leaders. Mr. Weeth said many communities want to preserve their historic character and develop restrictions to accomplish this.

Mr. Weeth said an advantage of a scenic byway designation is that the routes are marketed nationally and scenic byways are also eligible for scenic byway grant funds. Mr. Weeth gave some examples in the MRRPC region of scenic byway funding: a dredging and amenity project on Riecks Lake in Buffalo County, an interpretive center in the City of Prescott in Pierce County, and a welcome and tourism center in the City of Onalaska in La Crosse County.

Mr. Weeth said Citizens for a Scenic Wisconsin want to protect Wisconsin's historical and cultural resources and treasures for future use. He said that Wisconsin has many historic barns filling the scenic countryside. He said that in 1935 Wisconsin had over 199,876 farms and by contrast assuming they all had a barn, only 35,386 barns remain standing throughout the State. He said that Vernon County is home to many round barns that are real treasures. He said several grass roots groups are taking steps to preserve Wisconsin's barns.

Mr. Weeth said the proposed State Hwy 33-136 scenic byway is 114 miles in length and consists of two lane highways through mostly rural and small towns. The proposed byway would begin in historic Portage along the Wisconsin River, and proceed through the Baraboo Range to Rock Springs by North Freedom to Reedsburg. It then snakes through the valleys of the hill country of La Valle, Wonec, Union Center and Hillsboro through Wildcat Mountain State Park to Ontario along the Kickapoo River. From there it cuts through the wooded valleys of Cashton and runs the ridges of the coulees to Middle Ridge, St. Joseph and La Crosse where it connects to the Great River Road of the Mississippi River in historic downtown La Crosse. The route includes five cities, 7 villages and 18 towns. Mr. Weeth said there are a number of potential county roads and local roads along STH 33 and 136 that could qualify for designation as State Rustic Roads. Mr. Weeth said a scenic historic assessment of the route has to be developed as well as an outline of a Corridor Management Plan (CMP). Mr. Weeth continued by listing some of the scenic treasures on the route. Mr. Weeth outlined the entire process from start to finish of getting the scenic byway designation. He said a survey has to be done as part of the CMP planning process. He explained the CMP will be developed, and reviewed and refined several times before final approval. He said communities will need to approve resolutions in support of the CMP and they will be submitted with the final application.

Mr. Weeth said there are no costs for municipalities to participate. Commissioner Murray commented that the current highways aren't taken care of now and that trimming along many roads has been neglected due to budget constraints. Mr. Weeth this does not include building new roads, we are just seeking a scenic byway designation. Commissioner Johnson asked who prepares the CMP plan. Commissioner Krachey said there doesn't have to be a cost for preparing the plan, and that anyone could prepare the plan. There was some discussion on the planning process. Commissioner Ehram asked how many Rustic Roads were located in Wisconsin? Mr. Weeth said there were 104 and that the Wisconsin Department of Transportation web site has information on all rustic roads. Commissioner Ritscher inquired about information on restoring the State's unusual barns. Mr. Weeth said there is money available through the State Historical Society. He added we are losing about 400 barns a year. Some discussion occurred regarding the high cost of roofing the barns and the tax liability after the improvements are made. Commissioner Leys said the key to preserving a barn is to keep the roof in shape. Mr. Weeth asked if anyone had any further questions and Chairman Savage thanked Mr. Weeth for his presentation.

Decision on Subcontract with West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (WCWRPC) to Assist in Implementing the 2007 Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan (SCIP).

Mr. Flogstad presented a contract between the West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission and the MRRPC to implement a Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan (SCIP). Mr. Flogstad reviewed the work elements of the contract. Chairman Savage asked if there were any questions on the contract and asked for approval. Commissioner Burke made a motion to approve the contract between the WCWRPC and the MRRPC as presented. Commissioner Schnitzler seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

Decision on Crawford County Land and Water Resources Management Plan

Peter Fletcher presented a contract between Crawford County and the MRRPC to secure the planning services of the MRRPC to update the Crawford County Land and Water Resource Plan. Mr. Fletcher said the plan was originally prepared by the County. He said the plan has to be updated every five years, and the MRRPC will be assisting the County with that update under this contract. He said that once the update is complete, it will serve as the County's plan for the next five years. Chairman Savage

asked for a motion on the contract. Commissioner Schnitzler made a motion to approve the contract as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ehram and it was approved unanimously.

Decision on Approval of 2010 Annual Update of Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Report

Bryan Law said everyone should have received a copy of the 2010 annual CEDS update. He said the report provides a snapshot of the economic condition of the region. He said the region's population is growing at a moderate rate. He said the region's unemployment rate has been growing at a faster rate than the State and Nation but slowed down between 2008-2009. He said a bright spot in the region is that manufacturing grew slightly. Mr. Law said this report also includes MRRPC economic development strategies for the region. He said a major economic development strategy is forming economic development partnerships and encouraging industry networks as catalysts for innovation and regional economic growth. Chairman Savage asked if anyone had any questions or comments and asked for a motion to approve the 2010 Annual Update of the CEDS. Commissioner Johnson made a motion to update the 2010 Annual Update of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Report. Commissioner Purdy seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

Daily Commuter Bus Route Project to Service La Crosse, Vernon and Crawford Counties

Peter Fletcher said the City of Prairie du Chien is undertaking a commuter feasibility study for the Prairie du Chien-La Crosse Wisconsin corridor. The study is primarily looking at Highway 35 and the surrounding area. A commuter bus could provide transportation services in getting employees to major employers such as Cabelas and assist in getting residents to medical appointments etc. He said another possible commuter route is Viroqua to La Crosse. He said possibly both routes could be combined making a commuter bus more feasible. Mr. Fletcher said the feasibility study is scheduled to be done in August and if shown feasible service could begin in 12-18 months. The commuter service could get between 60-80% DOT funding and the local match would be made up through fare revenue etc.

Report on Food Resource and Agri-business Network – Industry Cluster Initiative.

Mr. Law said final FRAN report was sent to the U.S. Department of Commerce-Economic Development Administration. Mr. Law passed around copies of the report and briefly reviewed its contents. He said a positive outcome of this project includes a shrink-wrap collection recycling program that can save companies thousands of dollars each year. Mr. Law said joint corrugate recycling and preventing empty truck backhauling may also be pursued in the near future for quantity discount and energy saving benefits. Mr. Law said a website is also under construction and will be launched in the near future to help this network of companies recruit new members, exchange information, and arrange cooperative trucking and transportation projects. Mr. Law said FRAN members met on April 10th and the rudiments of a formal structure for FRAN are beginning.

Kickapoo Valley Regional Economic Development Initiative (KVREDI) and long-term flood recovery projects in Gays Mills and La Farge.

Mr. Law said an inventory of assets in the Kickapoo Valley can be used in marketing the Kickapoo region. He said one KVREDI member has also expressed a desire to develop a bike trail along the Kickapoo River. He said the potential of using pellet mills for power generation is not sufficient for utility of scale but could be used for power generation for schools and governments etc.

Mr. Law said a grant application was submitted to the Economic Development Administration (EDA) in June 2009 for the Village of La Farge for an infrastructure project connected to economic recovery from disastrous flooding in both 2007 and 2008. He said the La Farge application is still in progress. He said EDA continues its review of the application and the final decision on the application has to come from the federal EDA office. Mr. Law said the Village of Gays Mills recently received a \$4 million EDA grant to assist with their relocation efforts.

Status of contracts with La Crosse County Towns to implement their comprehensive plans

Mr. Fletcher gave a report on the status on contracts with La Crosse County Towns to implement their plans. He said staff has signed contracts with the Towns of Medary and Barre and that staff would assist them in implementing their Town Plans and updating subdivision ordinances etc. He said staff will be working with the Towns over the next three years.

Status of Comprehensive Plans: Towns of Albany, Lima (Pepin County); Greenfield (La Crosse County); Town of Byron (Monroe County); Towns of Clayton and Prairie du Chien and the Village of Gays Mills (Crawford County)

Mr. Bonifas said comprehensive plans have been completed for the Towns of Albany and Lima in Pepin County and the Town of Greenfield in La Crosse County.

Mr. Fletcher reported he has been assisting the Town of Prairie du Chien prepare its comprehensive plan. He said a public hearing draft is complete and a public hearing is scheduled for May 5, 2010. He said he is also working with the Town of Byron. He said a public hearing on their draft plan was held on Monday. He said the main issues in the Town of Byron are the cranberry bogs and wetlands and maintenance, and issues with bogs and resident wells. He said after the public hearing, necessary modifications will be made to the plan and it will be sent to the Town Board for final adoption. Mr. Fletcher said he assisted the Town of Clayton with the land use element of their comprehensive plan. Mr. Fletcher said that plan is complete and the Town Board has adopted the plan. Mr. Fletcher said he is also working with the Village of Gays Mills to develop a comprehensive plan. He said he attended a meeting last night where the planning committee reviewed survey results and began developing draft goals. Mr. Fletcher said there is a desire in the Village to maintain their historic area but they are also aware a new area must be built in order for the Village to grow.

Status of MRRPC application to the State of Wisconsin for a Regional Planning Grant

Mr. Bonifas reported that there were 15 applications for comprehensive planning funds. He said the MRRPC has not heard any news about the \$175,000 Regional Planning Grant the MRRPC applied for. He said that Pepin County also applied for comprehensive planning funds and they have not heard anything either.

Report on County Comprehensive Planning in Crawford, Jackson, Monroe, and Vernon Counties and Status of Pepin County Comprehensive Plan Grant

Mr. Bonifas reported that Jackson County held a cluster meeting in March to develop future land use maps for their comprehensive plan. He said they hope to finalize plan text in the coming months and hold individual public hearings for all local governments in July. He said a draft plan is available for Monroe County online. He said three open houses are scheduled for that plan on May 18th at Wilton; May 19th at Tomah; and May 20th at Sparta. He said a public hearing will be held on the final Monroe County draft in June.

Status of Crawford, Pepin, Trempealeau, and Vernon Counties' Multi Hazard Mitigation Plan Updates

Mr. Bonifas said that he has been working with Crawford, Trempealeau, and Vernon Counties on updating their existing hazard mitigation plans. Mr. Bonifas said the Vernon and Crawford County updates have been completed. He said that work on the Trempealeau County update continues. Mr. Bonifas said the Pepin County Hazard Mitigation Plan is in the beginning stages. He said a hazard risk survey is underway to rank hazards low, medium or high in the County.

Old Business and New Business

No old business was reported. Mr. Flogstad made note of a state grant awarded to USEMCO, a business located in Tomah. The grant was awarded to assist them develop manure digesters to help small farms turn waste into electricity.

Commissioner Leys made to motion adjourn. The motion was seconded by and approved unanimously.

This is to certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the April 14, 2010, bimonthly meeting minutes approved on the 9th day of June 2010.

Vicki Burke, Secretary-Treasurer