



**MISSISSIPPI RIVER  
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION**

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*Eugene Savage, Black River Falls  
Chairman*  
*Margaret Baecker, Independence  
Vice Chairman*  
*Vicki Burke, Onalaska  
Secretary & Treasurer*  
*Greg Flogstad, Onalaska  
Director*

**MINUTES**

**MISSISSIPPI RIVER REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION (MRRPC)**

**BIMONTHLY MEETING**

**10:00 a.m., June 11, 2014**

**Seasons by the Lake, 910 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue North, Onalaska, Wisconsin**

**Call to Order**

Chairman Savage called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. and asked for the roll call. Greg Flogstad, Director took the roll and stated a quorum was present. Guests: Chris Anderson, Tony Kurtz Campaign; John Medinger, representing U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin; Francis Schelfhout, Wisconsin Department of Transportation. The attendance roster is attached.

**Minutes of April 9, 2014 Bimonthly Meeting**

Chairman Savage asked for a motion to approve the April 9, 2014 bimonthly minutes. Commissioner Ehram made a motion to approve the minutes; the motion was seconded by Commissioner Kuhn to accept the April 9, 2014 bimonthly meeting minutes and the motion was carried unanimously.

**Treasurer's Report**

Ms. Burke said the March 31, 2014 balance in all MRRPC accounts was \$290,072.29 and the April 30, 2014 ending balance was \$294,453.33. She reported the beginning balance in April 30, 2014 was \$294,453.33 and May 31, 2014 balance was \$267,943.02.

Ms. Burke referred everyone to the MRRPC Business Revolving Loan Fund report for the period of April 2014 through May 2014. She said the report shows all revolving loan fund activity since the last bimonthly meeting. Ms. Burke said the Business Capital Fund (BCF) began with an April 1, 2014 balance of \$260,763.55. Activity from April 1, 2014 through May 31, 2014 included loan repayments of \$11,325.75, interest earned of \$84.73, a transfer of \$32,076.63 to BCF Sequester Account, and \$1,500 in administrative expenses leaving a May 31, 2014 balance of \$238,597.40. The BCF Sequester Account began with an April 1, 2014 balance of \$301,603.60. Activity from April 1, 2014 through May 31, 2014 included \$117.34 in interest, a deposit of \$32,076.63 from the BCF Fund, and an interest payment of \$83.67 to the U.S. Treasury leaving a May 31, 2014 balance of \$333,713.90.

Ms. Burke said the Business Capital Fund 2 began with an April 1, 2014 balance of \$61,598.09. Activity from April 1, 2014 through May 31, 2014 included loan repayments of \$953.62, interest earned of \$20.35, a transfer of \$2,603.69 to the BCF II Sequester Account, and administrative expenses of \$250 leaving a May 31, 2014 balance of \$59,718.37. Ms. Burke said the Business Capital Fund 2 Sequester Account began with an April 1, 2014 balance of \$152,639.17. Activity from April 1, 2014 through May 31, 2014 included interest earned of \$57.98, a deposit of \$2,603.69 from the Business Capital Fund 2, and an interest payment to the U.S. Treasury of \$51.93 payment leaving a May 31, 2014 balance of \$155,248.91.

Ms. Burke said the CMV Growth Development Fund began with an April 1, 2014 balance of \$38,665.26. Activity from April 1, 2014 through May 31, 2014 included loan repayments of \$518.50 and interest earned of \$6.70 leaving a May 31, 2014 balance of \$39,190.46. Ms. Burke said the CMV Growth Development Fund Sequester Account began with an April 1, 2014 balance of \$164,019.19 and said that activity from April 1, 2014 through May 31, 2014 included interest earned of \$28.31 leaving a May 31, 2014 balance of \$164,047.50.

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***A Nine County Economic Development District Providing Assistance to Local Governments***

- *Land Use Planning* ▪ *Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances* ▪ *Transportation Planning* ▪ *Economic Development Planning*
- *GIS Mapping* ▪ *Recreation Planning* ▪ *Revolving Loan Fund Administration* ▪ *Grant Writing* ▪ *Socioeconomic Data Dissemination*
- *Assist Local Interests in Responding to State and Federal Programs* ▪ *Advisory Service on Local Planning Issues*
- *Coordinating Agency for Programs and Activities* ▪ *Public Advocacy on Issues Affecting Our Region*

The La Crosse County Economic Development Fund began with an April 1, 2014 balance of \$51,165.77 and activity from April 1, 2014 through May 31, 2014 included loan repayments of \$1,420, interest earned of \$16.08 and a transfer of \$5,431.86 to the La Crosse Economic Development Sequester Fund leaving a May 31, 2014 balance of \$47,169.99. Ms. Burke said the La Crosse County Economic Development Fund Sequester Account began with an April 1, 2014 balance of \$69,033.78. Activity in this account from April 1, 2014 through May 31, 2014 included interest earned of \$24.03 and a deposit of \$5,431.86 from the La Crosse County Economic Development Fund leaving a May 31, 2014 balance of \$74,489.67.

Chairman Savage commented on the inactivity of the revolving loan funds. He questioned if it was a lagging economy or that other interest rates are so low they don't need these funds. Commissioner Leys commented the funds have been inactive for sometime. Mr. Flogstad said the monies that were active back in the 90's but nothing has changed as far as what we can do with these funds. He said a few years ago there were efforts to defederalize the funds but that didn't happen. Mr. Law said when these funds were first allocated the interest rates were much higher making the revolving loan funds attractive, but that isn't the case anymore. He said now these revolving loan funds are at a disadvantage. He said the other thing is they are designed to provide gap financing, but now fewer borrowers are qualifying for bank loans, and that's a prerequisite for getting a revolving loan fund loan. What's happening right now is the borrowers that are qualifying for loans are qualifying without a gap. Banks are financing good projects with good collateralization so there is less need for revolving loan fund financing.

Chairman Savage asked for a motion to approve the treasurers reports presented. Commissioner Twidt made a motion to approve the treasurer's reports as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Baecker and approved unanimously.

Mr. Law reported there were no new RLF applications since the last bimonthly meeting. Mr. Law said he has received a loan application for the Business Capital Fund but it is a very problematic application. Commissioner Murray commented that he liked the new format of the treasurers reports.

#### **Election of Officers for Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary Treasurer**

Chairman Savage said the election of officers was the next item on the agenda. He said everyone should have received a copy of the election rules. Chairman Savage asked Commissioner Ehram, a member of the Nominating Committee, to give the nominations. Mr. Ehram said the Nominating Committee consisting of himself, Commissioner Ron Carney, and Commissioner Mike Murray met on May 28, 2014 at the Buffalo County Courthouse in Alma. Mr. Ehram explained we will also take nominations from the floor and the votes will be by ballot. He said staff will hand out the ballots and also do the counting. Commissioner Ehram started the election process for Chairman. Mr. Ehram said that Jim Kuhn from Monroe County and Del Twidt from Buffalo County are nominated and have both agreed to run for the office of Chairman. He called for additional nominations for chairman three times, hearing no other nominations he closed the nominations and staff distributed, collected and counted the ballots electing the chairman. The ballots were counted twice and Mr. Ehram announced that Jim Kuhn, Monroe County Commissioner, was elected Chairman. The vote was 11 to 7. Mr. Kuhn was congratulated and given a round of applause. Commissioner Kuhn thanked the Commission for the confidence in him electing him as the new Chairman.

The election for Vice Chair was next. Mr. Ehram stated the Nominating Committee nominates Marge Baecker the current Vice Chairman who has agreed to serve another term. He then asked if there were any additional nominations from the floor for Vice-Chairman. Commissioner Murray nominated Commissioner Twidt for Vice Chairman. Mr. Ehram again called for any additional nominations three times and hearing none the nominations were closed. Before distributing the ballots Del Twidt's name was entered on the ballots. The ballots were then distributed, collected, and counted by MRRPC staff.

Mr. Savage said that while staff was counting the ballots he wanted to take this time and thank the Commission for letting him serve as Chairman. He mentioned Irv Schnick who he replaced as Jackson County Commissioner as a county board recommended member in 1993. He said through the years he was appointed and reappointed by Governor's Thompson, Doyle and most recently Governor Walker. Mr. Savage said he still has three years to serve out his term as Jackson County Commissioner but he felt it was time to step down as Chairman. He said they are digging the hole and pouring the foundation for the first coop senior housing in Black River Falls, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of its kind in Wisconsin. He said when the project is completed he is signed up to reside in apartment 302. Everyone gave Mr. Savage a round of applause for his service. Mr. Ehram again thanked Mr. Savage and Commissioner Schlesselman then made a motion thanking Chairman Savage for all his years of dedication and service to the Commission. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Twidt and approved unanimously.

Mr. Ehram then announced that Commissioner Baecker had been reelected as Vice Chairman. The vote was 11 to 7.

The election of secretary treasurer was next. Commissioner Ehrsam stated the Nominating Committee nominates Vicki Burke the existing Secretary-Treasurer who has agreed to serve another term. He then asked for nominations from the floor three times. No other nominations were presented. Mr. Ehrsam then closed the nominations. Commissioner Ehrsam made a motion to cast a unanimous ballot electing Vicki Burke as Secretary Treasurer. The motion was seconded and carried unanimously.

Newly elected Chairman Kuhn asked for another round of applause for retiring Chairman Savage.

### **Public Comments on MRRPC's Plan to Comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987**

Mr. Fletcher explained that the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission is a subrecipient of Wisconsin Department of Transportation (DOT) funding. He said the DOT requires that all subrecipients prepare a Title VI Plan and explained the requirements. He said the purpose of the plan is to assure that no person or groups of persons shall, on the grounds of race, color or national origin be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any and all programs, services, or activities administered by the MRRPC, regardless of whether those programs and activities are federally funded or not. In addition, that the MRRPC will provide meaningful access to services for persons with Limited English Proficiency. He explained the process of preparing the plan. Mr. Fletcher said WI-DOT provided guidance in preparing the plan. He said a draft was sent to WI-DOT and they provided comments and input. He said the plan has to be submitted to WI-DOT by August 2014 and will then go to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). He explained the plan calls for looking at counties within the region and the Safe Harbor Threshold which is 5% of a population group or a population group numbering over 1,000 that speak English "Less than well". He said if either of those thresholds is met we have to provide accommodations for them. One group in the MRRPC region met this threshold, the Hmong population, in La Crosse County. The next closest group, but did not meet the threshold, is "Spanish" in Trempealeau County. Mr. Fletcher explained a Title VI notice is posted in Hmong in the MRRPC office. He explained there is a form that can be completed if people feel they are being discriminated against. He said we are fortunate to be able to work with the La Crosse County aging unit and utilize their expertise. He reviewed more elements of the plan and explained many elements of the plan are required. He said this meeting provides an opportunity for public comments on the plan. He said there are a few annual reporting requirements associated with the plan. He briefly discussed those requirements. Staff training was provided on how to deal with this in the office if any issues arise. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments from the public or commissioners on the Title IV plan. Hearing none, Chairman Kuhn asked for a motion on approving the Resolution to comply with the Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 and all regulations and statutes including a Limited English Proficiency Plan. Commissioner Barr made a motion to approve the Resolution 6.11.14, the motion was seconded by Commissioner Leys. Chairman Kuhn asked if there was any further discussion, and hearing none, the resolution was unanimously approved.

### **Decision on Contract to Update the Buffalo County Multi Hazard Mitigation Plan**

Mr. Bonifas presented a contract between Buffalo County, Wisconsin and the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission for the purpose of updating Buffalo County's Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan 2009-2013. Mr. Bonifas reviewed the contents of the contract. He asked if anyone had any questions on the contract. Commissioner Leys asked if the hazard of trains transporting oil and potential oil spills would be addressed in the plan. Mr. Bonifas said the plan only addresses natural hazards. An example of a natural hazard addressed for trains would be for flooding issues. Mr. Leys commented man made hazards should be looked at too. Mr. Bonifas the cost of preparing a plan looking at manmade hazards would be much higher and take much longer. He explained this is an update of the county's existing multi-hazard mitigation plan. Commissioner Schroeder brought up the issue of people who live in the floodplain and the flood proofing of their properties. There was some discussion on the flood proofing of properties. Mr. Flogstad said every structure in the floodplain is identified in these plans with a potential loss estimate. Mr. Flogstad said the plan provides a good inventory of these properties. Chairman Kuhn asked if there was any further discussion on the contract. Commissioner Burke made a motion to approve the contract between Buffalo County and the MRRPC. Commissioner Ehrsam seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

### **Public and Commissioner Comments on Regional Comprehensive Plan Goals and Recommendations**

Mr. Fletcher explained everyone should have received a copy of the regional comprehensive plan goals and recommendations for the various planning elements. He explained these are draft goals. Mr. Law said the bold highlighted goals are the broader goals and the items following are more narrow objectives. He said we want to be as comprehensive as possible. He then opened the floor for public comments on the goals presented. To help generate comments Mr. Law said as an example he does not remember

having anything under the goals to encourage energy efficiency housing. Mr. Fletcher said that smart growth goals must be addressed in the plan as we are receiving state funding to prepare this regional comprehensive plan. There are 14 state goals that must be addressed in the plan. He briefly discussed some of the transportation goals. Commissioner Schlesselman said goals should be included to address the aging demographic in the region. Mr. Fletcher said some of the goals can be fine-tuned to more directly address the aging population. Mr. Law explained that some of the goals do overlap over the various elements of the plan. Commissioner Murray commented there should be a goal addressing tourism opportunities in the Region. Commissioner Ross commented on Item 3.10 (e) "Support regional efforts to add additional AMTRAK train service to Tomah and La Crosse AMTRAK stops". He said the railroad is already experiencing problems and picking up a lot of traffic with delays. Mr. Fletcher said the transporting of the frac sand and oil are an issue. Mr. Flogstad said a study is going on now looking at the existing corridor and running another train a day. Commissioner Leys said adding another train a day would be destined to fail unless AMTRAK can fix their schedule issues. He said if you aren't on time you are destined to fail. You will never get large ridership on trains if you are chronically late. Mr. Ross said he has ridden on every train for over 50,000 miles and the train was probably on time three times. There was some more discussion on this issue. Commissioner Barr mentioned the language used in the goals presented and said the Commission functions as a resource or an advisory agency. Mr. Fletcher concurred and said the Commission doesn't have any authority but serves as an advisory planning commission. Commissioner Schlesselman said high speed Internet access in the region is spotty. Mr. Schlesselman also raised the issue about expanding natural gas lines and infrastructure to local communities and residences.

Commissioner Ross said the State has an active Department of Tourism that the MRRPC could work and collaborate with on projects. Mr. Law said that staff has collaborated with the state on various projects and mentioned the Kickapoo Valley. Mr. Law said as an economic planner often his focus is on areas that are more economically challenged. Mr. Law we do recognize that tourism is a huge part of the Region's economy. Mr. Fletcher said the MRRPC staff assists communities with recreation fund grant applications to help move recreation projects forward. Commissioner Schlesselman commented that organizing small community groups catering to tourism into more cohesive type organizations may help where they can share information and resources. He said we tend to reinvent the wheel. Commissioner Murray mentioned the Mississippi Valley Partners as a good tourism resource. Commissioner Smith said he would like to invite everyone to Pepin County to an open house on June 21<sup>st</sup> at 2:00 for the new addition to the Laura Ingles Wilder Museum in Pepin.

Commissioner Smith said that rail safety is an issue and preparing local fire departments for possible fires and spills along the river should be a goal. Mr. Bonifas said the BNSF railroad sends firefighters out to Colorado for one week of training to handle spills etc. He said when the firefighters come back they don't get any additional training so when they move on etc. there are less people trained. He said you can only get certified in that training by taking the one week course. He said many small communities in the region are so small they don't have the volunteers or equipment and can't take off a week for training. He said the State and local fire departments are pursuing additional training for firefighters on disaster events. Some more discussion occurred on this issue. Commissioner Leys said that the La Crosse County Hazmat team is the backup to Crawford County. There was some more discussion regarding possible train derailments and the impending disasters that could occur. Mr. Bonifas said the issue with trains that run along the Mississippi River is that it is difficult to get boons out there to clean up a hazardous materials etc. Mr. Medinger said he has been at meetings with BNSF representatives regarding the additional 4 miles of track they want to build. He said the Burlington Northern Santa Fe line sent fifteen firefighters from La Crosse out to Colorado for special training on rail issues. Commissioner Leys questioned if the Coast Guard would respond in case of a spill on the river. Mr. Medinger said all appropriate federal agencies would respond. There was some more discussion on federal agency response and how quickly they could respond. Mr. Medinger said he would try to get some more information on this issue. Commissioner Barr said the Coast Guard has a responsibility to respond.

Commissioner Schroeder said a goal should be construction of more pipelines to safely transport any hazardous materials. He said this is the safest way, and he mentioned pursuing the Keystone Pipeline that could reduce the flow of hazardous materials going through on rail lines. Commissioner Leys said another issue is the States taking away more power from local governments especially on such issues as frac sand mining and large farming operations. Mr. Fletcher asked if there were any more comments from the public or commissioners on the goals. Hearing none, he said that if anyone had any additional comments they should call the office or email. Mr. Law said there is an answering machine in the office so you can call anytime.

### **MRRPC's Draft Regional Renewable Energy Report**

Mr. Flogstad said everyone should have received a copy of the Mississippi River Region's Renewable Energy Report. He said a lot of the information in this report will make its way into the MRRPC Comprehensive Plan. He said the report looks at how much electricity the region actually consumes, how much we use, and what sources of energy in the region have the most potential. He reviewed energy resources in the region and how much energy produced by each. Using a combination of per capita estimates provided by the U.S. Energy Information Administration and Dairyland Power annual reports, it is estimated the region is producing more energy than we consume because of the Alma and Genoa coal plants. He said totally electricity produced annually in the region is over 5.4 million kWhs and total electricity consumed annually is about 3.4 million kWhs total. He said the region's leading

renewable energy sources are biomass, hydro, biogas, wind, and solar. He said the nine county region's renewable energy sources generate just over 7% of the region's total demand for electricity. He said reliance on any one renewable energy source puts the region at a higher risk because of weather and market conditions impacting supply and pricing so a mix of renewable electrical generating sources is preferred. He discussed what sources of energy in the region have the most potential. He mentioned a regional goal of encouraging and assisting efforts to at least double the region's production of renewable energy sources by 2024 to 369 thousand kWhs. He presented some different scenarios of producing energy from renewable energy sources for this to occur. He mentioned that the region's utilities are not installing solar and wind farms as much here as in neighboring states because of the region's rugged terrain. Hydro power and biomass are sources we are endowed with but are not as popular as solar and wind. He said the region's biogas is produced mostly from a solid waste landfill or manure from dairy cattle. He said that methane from La Crosse County's landfill is piped to Gundersen Lutheran Health Care campus in Onalaska where it is converted into both heat and electricity. He said hopefully this could be duplicated at other landfills. He mentioned two dairy farms in Vernon County that use methane from manure to power their farms and also produce excess electricity that is purchased by Dairyland Power Cooperative. He said this form of energy has great potential in the region and another positive is that methane digesters are manufactured in Tomah, Wisconsin. Mr. Flogstad said a good reason to pursue renewable energy products is that regions or states that produce the most electricity from renewable energy pay less for it, create jobs, save more and are more energy secure.

Commissioner Schroeder mentioned the expansion of transmission lines from the Alma Plant to Pine Island and Grand Meadows, Minnesota. Mr. Flogstad said that expansion is part of CAPX 2020. Commissioner Leys asked if recent actions by the Federal government would discourage coal fired plants. Chairman Kuhn mentioned the new solar project at Westby. There was some discussion on increasing the region's renewables and Commissioner Barr contended it is a function of cost. There was some discussion on wind turbines and how they can change the landscape. Commissioner Schroeder said at Grand Meadows, a site with many turbines, at night, all you can see is red lights. The aesthetics of wind turbines can be an issue. Commissioner Leys said at Lake Winnebago near Oshkosh, it's the same thing at night, across shore all you can see is blinking red lights. Commissioner Leys said it would be a lot quicker to convert coal to natural gas and mentioned global warming. Commissioner Schlesselman said nuclear energy isn't mentioned. Mr. Flogstad said he met with officials from both Xcel and Dairyland and neither shared optimism for nuclear due to costs and risks.

Commissioner Barr questioned investments such as the transmission lines currently being constructed, and who bears the cost. Mr. Flogstad said the CAPX 2020 transmission lines are planned to go on to Madison from north of Holmen and is a joint project between American Transmission Company and Xcel Energy. Commissioner Leys said these costs will be paid by the rate utility rate payers. Commissioner Smith questioned whether or not the public meetings held on CAPX 2020 were worth it because it seems they can do what they want to do.

#### **Update on Scenic Mississippi Regional Transit (SMRT) Bus Service Running in Crawford, Vernon and La Crosse Counties**

Mr. Fletcher said right now the SMRT Bus is tracking their current routes and determining the best routes for ridership. He said that himself and Garth Frable, the City Planner from Prairie du Chien will be making a presentation on the SMRT Bus at the American Planning Association State Conference at the end of June and will be making another presentation on the SMRT Bus at the Upper Midwest Planning Conference in Iowa in October. He said any publicity on the SMRT bus is good. He said with limited resources of funding for 2014 some of the less used bus routes were eliminated or the hours of service were reduced. He said by 2015 funding will be reduced by 20% from WI-DOT so we have to make sure we are running the most efficiently. He said all transportation modes rely on some state and federal funding.

#### **Old Business and New Business**

Director Flogstad said we originally decided to have our meetings for six month at Seasons by the Lake, and after that time we would determine whether or not to continue at the current meeting location or whether to schedule our meeting elsewhere. He said the MRRPC has been contacted by Best Western and they are now under new ownership. He asked what Commissioners would like to do as future meeting arrangements. Commissioner Krachey made a motion to go back to Best Western for six months. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ehsam. Chairman Kuhn asked if there was any discussion. Commissioner's Folcey and Leys both commented they would prefer to stay at Seasons by the Lake. Chairman Kuhn asked for a vote of approval on the motion to schedule meetings at Best Western for the next six months. A voice vote was taken on the motion and the aye's carried the motion. Vice-Chairman Baecker suggested sending a map of the new meeting location with the next bimonthly meeting notice.