



**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
Greg Flogstad, Onalaska, WI
Director

MINUTES
MISSISSIPPI RIVER REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION (MRRPC)
BIMONTHLY MEETING
10:00 a.m., June 14, 2017

Americinn (formerly Best Western Riverfront Hotel), 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. The attendance roster is attached. There was one guest in attendance: Ryan Cornett, Representing Senator Tammy Baldwin.

Minutes of April 12, 2017 Bimonthly Meeting

Chairman Kuhn asked for a motion on the April 12, 2017 bimonthly minutes. Commissioner Twidt made a motion to approve the April 12, 2017 meeting minutes and the motion was seconded by Commissioner Ehrsam. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments and hearing none, the minutes were unanimously approved.

Treasurer's Report

Secretary-Treasurer Burke gave the treasurers report. Ms. Burke said the March 31, 2017 balance in all MRRPC accounts was \$311,197.18 and the April 30, 2017 ending balance was \$299,095.69. She reported the beginning balance in May 2017 was \$299,095.69 and May 31, 2017 ending balance was \$283,220.68.

Ms. Burke said the Business Capital Fund (BCF) began with a March 31, 2017 balance of \$266,178.72. Activity from April 1, 2017 through May 31, 2017 included loan repayments of \$14,493.28, interest earned of \$90.85, and administration expenses of \$2,790.00 leaving a May 31, 2017 balance on hand of \$277,972.85. The BCF Sequester Account began with a March 31, 2017 balance of \$454,224.59. Activity from April 1, 2017 through May 31, 2017 included interest earned of \$182.31 and interest to EDA of \$252.33 leaving a balance on hand of \$454,154.57.

Ms. Burke said the Business Capital Fund 2 began with a March 31, 2017 balance of \$38,826.11. Activity from April 1, 2017 through May 31, 2017 included loan repayments of \$1,480.00, interest earned of \$13.18, and administration expenses of \$355.00 leaving a May 31, 2017 balance of \$39,964.49. Ms. Burke said the Business Capital Fund 2 Sequester Account began with a March 31, 2017 balance of \$160,651.39. Activity from April 1, 2017 through May 31, 2017 included interest earned of \$64.48 and interest to EDA of \$110.53 leaving a May 31, 2017 balance on hand of \$160,605.34.

Ms. Burke said the CMV Growth Development Fund began with a March 31, 2017 balance of \$51,161.89. Activity from April 1, 2017 through May 31, 2017 included loan repayments of \$467.08 and interest earned of \$7.87 leaving a May 31, 2017 balance of \$51,636.84. Ms. Burke said the CMV Growth Development Fund Sequester Account began with a March 31, 2017 balance of \$104,088.80. Activity from April 1, 2017 through May 31, 2017 included interest earned of \$15.96 and interest to EDA of \$44.10 leaving a balance of \$104,060.66.

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***

The La Crosse County Economic Development Fund began with a March 31, 2017 balance of \$10,873.99. Activity from April 1, 2017 through May 31, 2017 included loan repayments of \$3,049.68 and interest earned of \$3.22 leaving a May 31, 2017 balance of \$13,926.89.

Chairman Kuhn asked for a motion to approve the treasurer's report as presented. Commissioner Ehrsam made a motion to approve the treasurer's report. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Borreson. Chairman Kuhn asked if there were any questions or comments and hearing none, the treasurer's report was unanimously approved.

Decision on Amendments to MRRPC's 2017-2022 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

Mr. Flogstad said there was an amendment that needed to be added to the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy that was adopted at the last bimonthly meeting. He directed the commissioners to page 92 under objective w. in their copies of the CEDS document. He said that this is a big concern in our region and many communities in our district have been able to get additional funding for grants with this objective and that it is also addressed in the Region's Comprehensive Plan. He read the amendment about the region's karst geography and how this makes the region vulnerable to groundwater pollution and read the changes to the commissioners. Mr. Flogstad said that the communities of Viola and Viroqua had each received an additional 10 points when applying for USDA Rural Development grants to make improvements to their sewer treatment facilities due to addressing this objective in the Regional Plan. Chairman Kuhn asked for a motion approving the Amendment to the 2017-2022 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). Commissioner Leys commented that it was important and pointed out ground water issues occurring in Kewaunee County in Wisconsin. Commissioner Purdy made a motion to approve the Amendment to the 2017-2022 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). Commissioner Nickelatti seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

Report on the Crawford County Farmland Preservation Plan

Mr. Bonifas said the first Crawford County Farmland Preservation Plan was adopted in 1981. Since 1981 there have been 120 Farmland Preservation agreements that have been in place. In the last decade, there has been a steady decline in the number of plans because landowners have not been reenrolling. In 2009 the state adopted the Working Lands Initiative to address preserving farmland. He said that the old Farmland Preservation Plan was for individual farmers to enroll which created a checkerboard pattern. With the Working Lands Initiative larger tracts of land instead of the checkerboard pattern are being organized to reduce development in the middle of farmland. State wide the number of landowners that have been able to utilize this tax credit has been increasing. In Crawford County Farmland Preservation agreements expire and are not being renewed. There were 75 farmers with Farmland Preservation Agreements in 2009. By 2015 there will only be 26 and by 2020 only 14 agreements will remain. To be eligible for the tax credits under the Working Lands Initiative farmers will have to be in an Agricultural Enterprise Area and/or zoned Exclusive Agriculture to get the tax credits. Mr. Bonifas said that Crawford County does not have county wide zoning so farmers need to create Agriculture Enterprise Areas to continue to receive tax credits. The threshold size that DATCP has approved thus far for Agriculture Enterprise Areas is 800 acres. Mr. Bonifas gave an example that five farms together could create an Agriculture Enterprise Area and qualify for the Working Lands Initiative Farmland Preservation Tax Credits. Goals for the Crawford County Farmland Preservation Plan were drawn from the County's Comprehensive Plan and the survey and data gathered was used in the plan. He said a Farmland Preservation Map was developed with the towns' input to the county. Commissioner Borreson asked if there were any advantages to county wide zoning. Mr. Bonifas said that the counties that have a Farmland Preservation Plan, and an Exclusive Agricultural Zoning District in their zoning ordinance allows farmland owners to be eligible for Farmland Preservation Tax Credits. Mr. Bonifas said that because of the large tracts of farmland in the villages of Bell Center, Steuben, and Soldiers Grove they have decided to prepare their own Farmland Preservation maps. Commissioner Kraft asked if the Farmland Preservation Plan is a zoning ordinance. Mr. Bonifas said the Farmland Preservation Plan is not a zoning district but an analysis and mapping document that must be prepared as the first step a county takes in preserving agricultural land by making farmers eligible for tax credits.

Report on the SMRT Bus operations serving La Crosse, Vernon, and Crawford Counties: 2017 survey, ridership trends and future funding.

Mr. Fletcher said that a survey is conducted annually of Scenic Mississippi River Transit - SMRT Bus riders. During two consecutive weeks riders have an opportunity to complete the survey. The survey was completed this year during the first two weeks in May. He said that there were over 60 responses to the survey. All participants who completed the survey said that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the service that they have received. The main age groups of ridership are 25-64. The SMRT Bus is in its fifth year of operation. Participants were asked how many times a week they rode the SMRT Bus, 1-2 days, 3-4 days, 5 days. There was an increase in the number of riders riding 3-4 days a week with 55%-60% going to and from work. He said that there was a decrease in riders to and from school but this could have been due to Western Technical College, Viterbo University, and UW-L ending their semesters at the time of the survey. Mr. Fletcher said that there has been an increase in the number of riders using the SMRT Bus for

medical appointments, shopping, and visiting. Ridership for Gundersen Health System and Organic Valley has increased. There was an additional route created for Organic Valley to La Farge which had increased ridership, but recently is decreasing with the opening of Organic Valley's facility in Cashton, causing less employees going to La Farge. Mr. Fletcher said that the SMRT Bus has been funded by grants such as the Bremer Grant and businesses such as Gundersen Health Care, Organic Valley, state DOT and federal DOT funds as well as the fare box revenue.

Report on status of increased bus transit service from La Crosse to Tomah and La Crosse to Arcadia.

Mr. Fletcher said that the feasibility study on this bus route was completed. Now it is a matter of looking for matching funds. He said that Charlie Handy the La Crosse County Planner and Tom Faella the Director of the La Crosse Metropolitan Planning Organization had meetings with Golden Plump and Ashley Furniture to determine which employee shift times would make the most sense. The businesses said that they have a difficult time finding employees for the night shifts and could use a night shift route as a recruiting tool for those later shifts. Mr. Fletcher said that they also had meetings with stakeholders in the Tomah and Sparta area such as the Monroe County Board Chair, the Monroe County Administrator, City of Sparta Administrator, and the Monroe County board. They discussed having 2 or 3 round trips which would impact more shifts of work and increases funds needed from businesses, cities, villages, and the state. If funding is secured, the routes could begin in 2018. Mr. Cornett asked what other businesses were contacted about the SMRT Bus routes. Mr. Fletcher said that Toro, the VA Hospital, and Northern Engraving were some of the other businesses who were contacted. Commissioner Jaeckel asked about the routes. Mr. Fletcher said that the buses run their routes Monday through Friday and the buses can then be used on the weekends for alternative community activities for example one year the buses were used during the Galesville Apple Fest for shuttle service. He said that the organization just needs to pay the cost for the driver and bus expenses. Commissioner Baecker asked about the local start up costs for the new routes. Mr. Fletcher said that one bus route round trip would have a local cost of about \$40,000 per year.

Report on Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization (POWER) Grant Program for Buffalo County to prepare an Economic Development Strategy in response to the Alma coal power plant closure.

Mr. Flogstad said that the Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization (POWER) Grant Program for Buffalo County in response to the Alma coal power plant closure was completed. He said due to the coal power closure 194 jobs were lost. With the grant, an Economic Development Strategy was created. The study was completed by UW-Extension Community Development Staff. He then gave a brief report on findings and recommendations in the report. Commissioner McMillen-Urell thanked Mr. Flogstad for his work in administering this grant and that moving forward Buffalo County is pursuing hiring someone for economic development within the county.

Report on Federal Budget impact on the MRRPC.

Mr. Flogstad directed the commissioners to the handout in their folders which summarized the Presidential budget. Mr. Flogstad highlighted the department cuts that would directly affect the commission. He said that the proposed elimination of the Economic Development Administration within the US Department of Commerce would have a serious budget effect on the MRRPC and impact future in economic development projects in the region. He noted that EDA has partnered with many communities in the region to build many industrial parks, and other community public facilities that were economic development related. He also noted cuts to the Department of Homeland Security would impact Hazard Mitigation Planning funding and community facility projects involving recovering from a disaster. The proposed elimination of HUD's Community Development Block Grant program would also be a severe blow for housing and economic development projects throughout the state through federal formula funding to each state that makes its way to local communities each year. Other areas that could be impacted is the SMRT Bus if there are any cuts to the Department of Transportation and cuts to the Small Business Administration could impact business lending and the region's Revolving Loan Funds. Mr. Flogstad said that he wanted the commission to be aware of this situation. Commissioner Borresson asked if there is anything we should do. Mr. Flogstad it was probably early to act, other than to follow the federal budget process closely.

Commissioner Input on Annual Report and its Dissemination

Mr. Flogstad asked if there were any additional addresses that should be added to the dissemination list for the Commission's Annual Report. The Commissioners didn't have any new addresses to add.

Old, Business, New Business and Adjourn

Chairman Kuhn asked if there was any old business. Hearing none 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