

# **Executive Summary**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Meramec Region was designated as an Economic Development District in 1975 and, since then, has assisted in providing planning and technical assistance to local governments with the goal of improving the quality of life in participating counties. Most communities in the region do not have the resources to maintain professional staff to assist with planning and economic development. The district operates as the Meramec Regional Planning Commission (MRPC), created by Governor Warren E. Hearnes in 1969 under the State and Regional Planning and Community Development Act of 1965. At that time, the region included Crawford, Dent, Gasconade, Maries, Phelps and Washington counties. Additionally, on November 13, 1997, Governor Mel Carnahan issued Executive Order No. 97-14, adding Osage County to the boundaries of the Meramec Regional Planning Commission. On August 22, 2005, Missouri Governor Matt Blunt signed Executive Order 05-21, amending the boundaries of the Meramec Region to include Pulaski County. Pulaski County petitioned MRPC for inclusion in the region after withdrawing membership in a neighboring regional planning commission. The county, along with the cities of St. Robert, Waynesville and Dixon, officially joined MRPC in September 2005. The city of Crocker joined in April 2006.

The active membership now consists of eight counties and 31 cities. The MRPC executive committee consists of 52 members, one representative from each member county and its member cities and 13 at-large members representing labor, disabled, industry, business, education, minorities, finance, agriculture, elderly, emergency management, tourism and unemployed.

## **THE MERAMEC REGION**

The Meramec Region is an eight-county area located in the southeast-central portion of Missouri. The area covers over 5,133 square miles and includes eight counties and 31 municipalities. All counties and 31 cities are members of the Meramec Regional Planning Commission. The region is marked with gently rolling hills, deep valleys and plateaus. Numerous rivers and streams transverse the region, creating a natural draw for outdoor enthusiasts. Many of the small towns are industrial havens, yet the small farmer is still prevalent. Many wineries dot the countryside, making it a popular draw for tourists.

In 2000, the eight-county Meramec Region was home to 179,372 people, an increase of 9.5 percent since 1990. This was three times the growth rate of the 1980s. The region grew at a faster pace in the 1990s than the state, which posted an 8.6 percent increase in population from 1990 to 2000. Individual 2000 county populations range from a low of 8,903 in Maries County to 41,165 in Pulaski County. All counties, except Pulaski, demonstrated individual growth from 1990 to 2000, ranging from a high of 18.9 percent in Crawford County to 8.7 percent in Osage County. Pulaski County's population decreased by .3 percent from 1990 to 2000. The largest city in the region continues to be Rolla, the county

seat of Phelps County. It has 16,367 people. The smallest city is Morrison in Gasconade County with 123 residents.

The population center of the United States remains in the Meramec Region and moved westward from the 1990 center near Steelville in Crawford County to near Edgar Springs in Phelps County. The region's population in 2000 was fairly evenly divided between male and female. The region is predominantly white with a 3.72 percent minority population. This is up from 2 percent in 1990. Pulaski County is the region's most racially diverse county.

Incomes in the Meramec Region continue to be lower than the state or region. The estimated median income, based on 2000 Census information, was \$39,118. The state median income was \$46,044 while the U.S. median income was \$50,046. The region's median income is 82.7 percent of the state's rate and only 76.2 percent of the nation's rate. The region's poverty rate also runs higher than the state and nation's. Some 24,260 Meramec residents were living in poverty in 2000, which represents 14 percent of the population. Some 11.7 percent of all Missouri residents live in poverty while 12.4 percent of all U.S. residents were living in poverty in 2000. Washington County had the highest poverty rate in the region with 20.1 percent. The lowest was Osage County with 8.3 percent. The region, in the past, has been plagued with high unemployment rates. Washington and Dent counties experienced mine closings while other counties lost shoe and textile manufacturers. At one time, Washington County's unemployment approached 20 percent. The 2000 unemployment rate for the region was 4.1 percent. The state average was 3.3 percent.

The Meramec Region has 78,513 total housing units with 66,974 occupied, according to the 2000 Census. The average population per unit in the region is 2.53 people, which is very close to the state average of 2.48 people. Of the 66,974 occupied units, 47,949 are owner occupied while 19,025 are renter occupied, according to the 2000 Census. In 2000, the median value of a home in the region was \$69,263, according to the 2000 Census, compared to a state average of \$89,900. The median monthly rent for a home in the region in 2000 was \$374 while the state average was \$484. Roughly 53 percent of homes in the region are 20+ years old.

Some 74.7 percent of the region's population aged 25 and older have at least a high school diploma, according to the 2000 Census. This percentage is considerably less than state percentages. In 1990, 60.7 percent, of adults 25 years and older had at least a high school diploma. The region's most educated counties in 2000 were Phelps and Pulaski, which would be expected given the presence of a vocational-technical school, a state university and Fort Leonard Wood.

Over the years, the region has diversified its economy-after taking hard hits in the mining and textile industries. In the region, services was the largest employment sector, followed by manufacturing and retail trade. Over half of those employed in the service sector were in health care or education. The number of manufacturing firms in the region has continued to increase. The major public employer in the region is Fort Leonard Wood with 2,300 employees. The region's three major private employers are Wal Mart Distribution Center with 1,175 employees, Quaker Window with 625 employees and Von Hoffman Graphics with 500 employees.

Only three federal highways pass through the region: Interstate 44, U.S. 63 and U.S. 50. Interstate 44 bisects the region in a northeast to southwest direction and serves as the major highway between St. Louis and Springfield with Rolla being about the half-way point. U.S. 63 connects Vienna and Rolla with Jefferson City, and U.S. 50 runs east and west through Gasconade and Osage counties. Most highways in the region are state highways, and most are narrow, winding and curvy. Several Meramec communities have airports: the Rolla National Airport, located at Vichy; the Sullivan Airport; the Washington County Airport; the Salem Airport; the Cuba Airport; the Owensville Airport; the Hermann Airport; Waynesville Regional Airport, and Linn State Technical College Airport. Four railways serve the region. Burlington Northern operates the most miles of track in the region. That rail line follows the general route of I-44 through Crawford and Phelps counties. Rail service in the region is not as prevalent as it once was. Several miles of the former Rock Island rail have been abandoned for many years, however a new company has purchased this line of track in hopes of providing rail service to the Meramec Region and central Missouri. Amtrak also crosses the Meramec Region and stops at its very northeast point at Hermann. Navigable water transportation is provided at three locations in the region, all on the Missouri River. Those sites are Hermann, Gasconade and Chamois.

## **THE CEDS**

The Meramec Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) submitted an initial Overall Economic Development Program (OEDP) in 1975. That program was updated in 1998, presenting new information on the progress of the region as well as identifying additional needs.

The 2002 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy was a product of information gathered in meetings held in each of the seven counties in the Meramec Region. It has guided the activities of MRPC for the past five years. The list of needs that were identified across the region fell into eight major categories:

- Economic Development/Tourism
- Human Resources and Services
- Physical Environment
- Local Governments
- Transportation
- Housing
- Community Involvement and Communication
- Infrastructure

The Regional Action Plan sets forth a methodical approach to addressing the county and regional needs.

The economic development planning and support staff at MRPC consists of:

- Richard Cavender, executive director, has more than thirty-five years of regional planning experience.
- Bonnie Prigge, assistant director, has been with MRPC since 1991.

- Connie Willman, planning and development manager, has been with MRPC since 1994.
- Behshid Marcellus continues to work in the community and economic development department at MRPC. Behshid has been with MRPC since 1988.
- Chuck Cantrell joined MRPC in August of 1998 as the housing inspector for the CDBG neighborhood development projects.
- Lisa Warnke, staff secretary, was hired in September 2007.
- Amy McMillen joined MRPC in February 2007 as a community development specialist and is responsible for grant administration and transportation planning.
- Maria Kardon was hired in May 2006 as the business loans officer. She is responsible for loan closing and servicing.

A copy of this Revised CEDS will be made available to all member counties and cities in the Meramec Region as well as local economic developers and other interested groups/individuals.