

2021

State Priorities in the Meramec Region

An Issues Report For the Region's Legislative Delegation

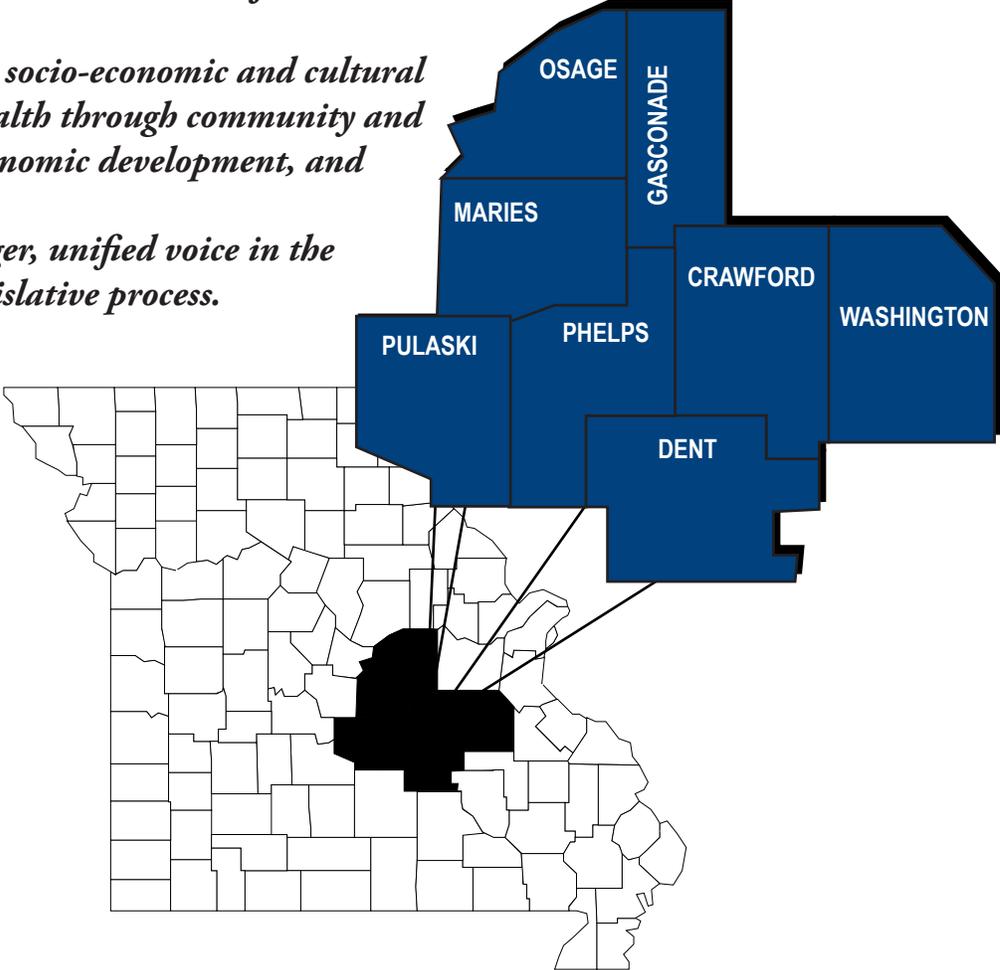
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The Meramec Regional Planning Commission's Mission

The mission of MRPC is to enhance the quality of life for residents of the Meramec Region. In pursuit of this mission, MRPC will bring about results in these areas:

- *Cleaner, healthier and safer communities,*
- *Greater socio-economic and cultural wealth through community and economic development, and*
- *A stronger, unified voice in the legislative process.*



The Meramec Regional Planning Commission is a voluntary council of local governments serving the Meramec area. The MRPC area includes the eight counties of Crawford, Dent, Gasconade, Maries, Osage, Phelps, Pulaski and Washington and their respective cities. Those cities are Bourbon, Cuba, Leasburg, Steelville, Sullivan, West Sullivan, Salem, Bland, Gasconade, Hermann, Morrison, Owensville, Rosebud, Belle, Vienna, Argyle, Chamois, Freeburg, Linn, Meta, Westphalia, Doolittle, Edgar Springs, Newburg, Rolla, St. James, Crocker, Dixon, Richland, St. Robert, Waynesville, Caledonia, Irondale, Mineral Point and Potosi.

2021 STATE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES IN THE MERAMEC REGION

As the 2021 legislative session begins, the board of the Meramec Regional Planning Commission would like to share with you concerns that are of interest to our organization as a whole and to our individual cities and counties. Each item is listed below with a brief explanation, in order of priority, as ranked by the MRPC board.

MRPC'S TOP STATE PRIORITIES

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION:

1. Support a state appropriation to cities and counties to address local transportation issues including updating existing bridges, low water crossings and chip and seal roads to insure access for emergency vehicles, school transportation and access to emergency services.
2. Assist in finding additional funding for Highways 63 and 50.
3. Pass a transportation funding bill to fund state roads and bridges (10-cent increase in gas tax for roads and bridges).

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

1. Appropriate state dollars to help implement the state broadband plan, which would increase access to high speed internet in rural communities. Ideally this would lead to the availability of 100 GB service.
2. Revise state tax laws to allow Missouri to comply with the South Dakota vs. Wayfair Supreme Court decision and collect state and local sales taxes on all internet sales using a streamlined uniform approach that does not place too great a burden on small businesses. Currently the State collects sales tax on out of state internet sales. Current restrictions are unfair to brick and mortar businesses that collect and submit sales taxes for local purchases. Recommendation: Allow for collection of internet sales taxes without requiring a vote at the county level.
3. Provide state incentives for downtown revitalization in rural areas.
4. Fully support Fort Leonard Wood and recognize that it is an economic development engine for Missouri.
5. Fully fund regional planning commissions. Most RPCs use their state planning dollars to leverage other funds. Currently, 19 RPCs/COGs share \$300,000. State law allows for appropriations of \$400,000.

HEALTH CARE/SOCIAL SERVICE:

1. Establish a statewide Prescription Drug Monitoring Program. Missouri is the only state in the nation without a PDMP.
2. Provide funding for more mental health programs and ensure access to those programs.
3. Increase state funding for Public Health at the local level.

ENVIRONMENTAL:

1. Support programs that provide incentives for market development and strive to establish more markets for recyclables in Missouri in order to create jobs and support local resource recovery programs.
2. Support efforts to eradicate feral hogs in Missouri. Feral hogs pose a serious threat to the state's number one industry - agriculture.
3. Increase funding for Missouri State Parks through appropriations. Missouri State Parks receive half of 1/10 of one cent Parks and Water sales tax which covers 3/4 of their budgets. The balance comes from user fees and federal funds.
4. Proactively address flooding issues at a statewide and regional level by prohibiting tax incentives for developments in the floodplain.

EDUCATION:

1. Continue to fully fund the Foundation Formula for public education.
2. Continue expansion of technical education, certificate programs and two year colleges and degrees, which supports Governor Parson's workforce development initiatives.
3. Ensure the state board of education is neutral politically and focuses on policies that will build and train an exceptional workforce for the industries of the future. Recognizing that traditional industries and jobs have to evolve with the new fields.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (CITY/COUNTY):

1. Stop unfunded mandates. For those initiatives that must be passed down to local governments, include adequate funding to cover the full cost of implementation, including administration, of the mandate.
2. Offer more grants or low interest loans available to small municipalities with smaller operating budgets for things such as improving roads, cleaning up properties, updating sewer systems and updates to infrastructure.
3. Allow county businesses to collect internet sales taxes without requiring a vote. Currently, the State collects sales tax on out of state internet sales. Current restrictions are unfair to the brick and mortar businesses that collect and submit sales/use taxes for local purchases.

GENERAL:

1. Oppose efforts to reduce funding for law enforcement.
2. Work toward providing competitive salaries for state employees so that Missouri does not have the distinction of having the lowest paid public employees in the nation.
3. Ensure full disclosure of all political contributions.

Highlights of 2020 Accomplishments

• MRPC's Impact

The Meramec Regional Planning Commission had a strong year in 2019-20. Planning commissions continue to be a vital part in regional planning across the state. Working with various state and federal agencies, MRPC was able to implement several different programs that worked to address environmental, planning, tourism and the opioid crisis within an eight-county region that includes Crawford, Dent, Gasconade, Maries, Osage, Phelps, Pulaski and Washington counties. This year, the planning commission took on the task of administering additional funds through CARES funding for six of the eight counties while working to continue the programs and projects MRPC was already administering and adapted to continue this work in the midst of a pandemic.

• Transportation

The partnership between Missouri regional planning commissions and the Missouri Department of Transportation continues to grow. Federal transportation legislation calls for increased local input into the state's planning programs and specifically mentions the regional development organizations as one of the means to involve local officials. The Planning Framework for Transportation Decision Making continues to be an important tool for increasing local input into transportation planning. This planning framework outlines the process for decision making and how local input, facilitated by regional planning organizations, affects transportation priorities.

MRPC's Transportation Advisory Committee held five meetings in 2019-20. The group continued to stress the importance of the region's top two transportation priorities—Highways 63 and 50 and provided input to MoDOT for the State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP). The TAC also continued to make traffic counters available to perform traffic studies. MRPC staff prepared and distributed press releases and made social media posts related to transportation issues. The TAC also updated and adopted a new planning matrix to use in county prioritization of projects. Through MoDOT, MRPC staff also worked with the Coalition for Roadway Safety to reduce the number of fatalities in the region through awareness efforts. Staff continued working with three communities - Bourbon (reconstruction of main street), Pulaski County (bridge replacement) and Linn (reconstruction of 1st and 5th streets) - on funding for transportation-related projects. Between the three, \$1,274,029 was granted to complete the projects.

• Community and Economic Development

MRPC is a designated Economic Development District (EDD), and through its planning grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, continues to work with its counties and cities to improve the infrastructure and economy of the region. With EDA planning funds, staff prepared funding applications for community and economic development projects. During FY 2019-20, \$3.7 million in federal and state grant monies flowed through the planning and development department for community and economic development projects. In FY 2019-20, staff assisted member communities with the following funding opportunities:

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s Drug Free Communities Program for Phelps County Child Advocacy Network to assist with prevention of underage drinking and youth vaping in Phelps County (Funded);
- Ralph and Donna Korte Foundation’s City Park program for City of Edgar Springs to install a playground and make improvements to the city park;
- US Department of Labor’s Workforce Opportunity for Rural Communities (WORC) for MRPC to expand job training and certification programs to Delta Regional Authority (DRA) counties;
- Ameren Corporation Foundation’s City Park program for City of Edgar Springs to install a playground and make improvements to the city park;
- Missouri Department of Public Safety’s LLEBG for Bland Police Department to purchase a new 2020 police cruiser;
- DRA’s Delta Workforce Program for MRPC to expand job training and certification program to the DRA counties;
- Missouri Department of Public Safety’s LLEBG for St. Robert Police Department for two in-car cameras;
- Missouri Department of Public Safety’s LLEBG for Edgar Springs Police Department for a second vehicle with mobile radio (Funded);
- Missouri Department of Economic Development’s (MoDED) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Workforce Initiative for the city of Salem to construct a new workforce training center at the Salem High School campus for students and adults (Funded);
- MoDED’s Youth Opportunities Program for Salem R-80 School District in the form of a \$219,000 in tax credits to allow the school to raise \$438,000 towards construction of new workforce training center (Funded);
- Economic Development Administration’s (EDA) EDD Local Technical Assistance Program for MRPC to host a VISTA to provide technical assistance to EDD’s in the Denver Region and perform economic development tasks for MRPC (Funded);
- Federal Highway Administration’s Federal Lands Access Program for Dent County to pave a steep section of county road 6670 leading to NPS Tan Vat access on the Current River (Funded);
- Missouri Foundation for Health Census 2020 Community Outreach and Engagement for MRPC to establish a Complete Count Committee in Phelps and Pulaski counties and conduct targeted outreach to under-counted populations;
- MoDOT’s Governor’s Cost Share Program for the Industrial Development Authority of the City of Potosi to add turn lanes on Highway 21 at the site of Stonecrest Subdivision commercial and residential development;
- MoDOT’s Governor’s Cost Share Program for the city of St. Robert for a new road off of Business Highway 66 to access commercial and industrial sites;
- Federal Highway Administration’s Federal Lands Access Program for Dent County to replace Cooley Bridge over Gordon Creek on county road 5610 (Funded);
- MoDED’s CDBG-DR for City of Pacific to acquire and demolish 27 properties in the floodplain/floodway;
- MoDED’s CDBG-DR for MRPC to complete housing studies in flood-impacted areas of the region (Funded);

- MoDOT’s Blueprint Coalition for Safer Roadways for Belle Police Department to replace two malfunctioning radar units (Funded);
- Missouri Department of Public Safety’s Violence Against Women Act for Pulaski County Prosecutor’s Office to reduce negative outcomes for women who are victims of violent crimes through retention of the STOP-VAWA Assistant Prosecutor position (Funded);
- Federal Highway Administration’s Federal Lands Access Program for Washington County to replace low water crossing over Lost Creek on Pigeon Roost Road to improve access to Mark Twain National Forest (Funded);
- Federal Highway Administration’s Federal Lands Access Program for Washington County to replace low water crossing over Middle Fourche Renault Creek on Harmon Road to improve access to Mark Twain National Forest (Funded);
- Federal Highway Administration’s Federal Lands Access Program for Crawford County to upgrade pavement on Eagle Hurst Road from Highway 8 to Brickey Bridge;
- Federal Highway Administration’s Federal Lands Access Program for Crawford County to upgrade pavement on Hobo Road from Highway 19 to the bridge over the railroad tracks (Funded);
- Marillac Mission Fund’s 2020 Census Outreach and Education program for Meramec Community Enhancement Corporation (MCEC) to establish a Complete Count Committee in Washington County and conduct targeted outreach to under-counted populations (Funded);
- Community Foundation of the Ozarks’ Coover Grant for Golden Echoes of Steelville, Inc. to purchase a new van for the Meals on Wheels Program;
- MDNR’s Land and Water Conservation Fund for city of Salem to develop soccer fields, parking and concessions at the old fairground property (Withdrawn);
- MDNR’s Land and Water Conservation Fund for city of St. Robert to develop a sports complex;
- MoDED’s Industrial Infrastructure program for City of Potosi to upgrade Ameren Road and Development Drive and extend main water into industrial park (Funded);
- US Department of Justice’s COPS Hiring Program for St. Robert Police Department to hire two new officers to help in high-crime, high-traffic neighborhoods (Funded);
- US Department of Justice’s COPS Hiring Program for Potosi Police Department to hire a school resource officer for elementary school and to perform other policing duties;
- US Department of Justice’s COPS Hiring Program for Vienna Police Department to hire one new officer to impact community policing (Funded);
- US Department of Justice’s COPS Hiring Program for Washington County Sheriff’s Office to hire three new sheriff’s deputies to fill positions that were previously cut due to budget (Funded);
- FEMA’s SAFER program for Edgar Springs Fire District to hire one full time firefighter;
- AmerisourceBergen Foundation Opioid Prevention program for MCEC to help with community prevention and education to combat the opioid crisis;
- MDNR’s VW Trust for city of Salem to replace a dump truck;
- MDNR’s VW Trust for city of Salem to replace digger derrick truck;
- EDA’s Economic Adjustment Assistance - CARES Act Supplemental for MRPC to recapitalize the Revolving Loan Fund for business loans in the region (Funded);
- EDA’s Economic Adjustment Assistance - CARES Act Supplemental for MRPC for planning and technical assistance to communities recovering from Covid-19 pandemic (Funded);

- Federal Home Loan Bank of Des Moines Affordable Housing Program for River Hills Housing to renovate 12 senior apartments in Hartsburg (Funded);
- Federal Home Loan Bank of Des Moines Affordable Housing Program for Liberty Senior Citizens Home to renovate 24 senior apartments in Taos (Funded);
- Federal Home Loan Bank of Des Moines Affordable Housing Program for MRPC to rehab 20 single-family housing around the region (Funded); and
- DRA's SEDAP 2020 for city of Bourbon to install a UV disinfection system at the waste water treatment plant (Funded).

Staff continued to disseminate funding information to member communities through grant alerts, workshops and seminars. Additionally, staff continued to improve methods of resource research by placing more emphasis on searches via the Internet and expanded their knowledge on new funding opportunities, as well as hiring an additional grant writer to address the increasing demand for those services. MRPC continued efforts to assist communities in meeting the need for affordable housing for low-to-moderate income families. Staff is beginning an update to the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The CEDS is an important document for those requesting grant funds as a requirement for many grants is that the project be identified through an economic development plan.

• **Business Loan Programs**

MRPC assists in developing the region's local economies by partnering to promote and assist the growth and development of businesses through innovative financing. Working in partnership with the Meramec Regional Development Corp., MRPC continues to manage a U.S. Small Business Administration Certified Development Company providing SBA 504 loan programs. Additionally, MRPC operates the region's revolving loan fund (RLF), which was created with an EDA grant and local matching funds. This fund was recapitalized in 2010 with \$375,000 of additional funding. In 2006-07, USDA provided a \$500,000 loan to MRPC to establish a new intermediary re-lending program, which was loaned out in 18 months. MRPC applied for, and received, an additional \$175,000 in IRP funding in 2010. MRPC was also awarded \$125,000 from the Missouri Department of Economic Development Microenterprise Grant fund.

Prior to June 30, 2020, MRPC was notified that it could be receiving \$780,000 for a new RLF through the CARES Act due to COVID-19's impact on businesses. These loan programs are important to rural Missouri as they provide much needed gap financing. Many rural banks are unwilling to make higher-risk commercial loans, however, the subordinated gap financing available through the SBA 504, the IRP and RLF reduce the banks' exposure. Loans are usually made in partnership with local private financial institutions. Eligibility for financing in these programs is dependent on creating and/or retaining jobs in the region, as well as financial stability and use of proceeds. The Meramec Region has used the SBA 504 program since 1991, the RLF since 1985 and the IRP since 2006, to assist in financing business start-ups and expansions.

Since 1991, SBA 504 loans have created or retained 1301 jobs in the Meramec Region for an average investment of \$20,972 per job. SBA's requirement is one job for every \$75,000 invested. Using the RLF program, which was established in 1985, the local development board has created or retained 1,117 jobs at a cost of \$4,019 per job. EDA's requirement is one job for every \$20,000 invested. The initial \$400,000 grant, plus 25 percent matching funds provided by member communities, has fully revolved. Some 77 loans worth \$4.49 million have been made through the RLF over the life of the

program. Under the IRP program, which was established in 2006, staff has made 20 loans and created or retained nearly 199 jobs, an average cost of \$8,082 per job. The total amount loaned through the IRP is \$1,608,350.

• Homeownership and Housing Renovation

One of the major barriers to economic development in Missouri is the availability of affordable housing, and Meramec Community Enhancement Corporation and MRPC have an established history of working together to provide homeownership opportunities to the region's low-income families.

Because MRPC employs a housing inspector with lead, mold and asbestos certification, MRPC also offers inspection services as well as code enforcement services for a fee to local governments and the private sector.

• Solid Waste Management

Ozark Rivers Solid Waste Management District (ORSWMD) is a seven-county area that includes Crawford, Dent, Gasconade, Maries, Phelps, Pulaski and Washington counties. ORSWMD contracts with MRPC to provide solid waste management programs across the Ozark Rivers region and manage day-to-day district operations.

Originally seven landfills served this area. These have all closed, and the region now has three transfer stations and two landfills. Solid waste management is now more crucial than ever for rural areas. The state of Missouri has targeted a 40 percent reduction of waste being landfilled, and the district has played a role in that effort. Efforts have been achieved through emphasis on education, expanding recycling opportunities, providing technical assistance and providing grant monies for local needs.

Since 2007, Ozark Rivers has awarded 174 grants totaling \$3.04 million to support local and regional projects. These grants have targeted businesses, local governments, schools and non-profits. The 2020 grant cycle provided funding for campground recycling at a state park; supported the operations of a school-based recycling program and composting education; expanded rural recycling collections; funded a school-based plastics recycling program feeding the manufacturing of recycled landscape timbers; provided staff salary and equipment maintenance for a community-based recycling center, purchased recycling bins and educational materials for a city-based recycling program and funded the creation of a children's book on littering. The Meramec Regional Planning Commission's grants provide for collection of illegally dumped tires along county roads, illegal dump prevention and cleanup program and prioritization of potential clean-up projects, Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) collection sites in the cities of Rolla and St. Robert, special waste collections (appliances, electronics, tires), educational programs for schools and community outreach and assistance. Each of these projects is consistent with the district's plan and goals.

The residential HHW program established two satellite collection facilities in 2008. Batteries, automotive fluids, fertilizers/pesticides, and flammable materials are some of the materials collected. To curb expenses, latex paint was removed as an accepted material in 2017, as latex paint is technically not a hazardous waste. HHW services collected 5.1 tons from 1,060 residents at an annual cost of \$12,423. The Missouri Recycling Association (MORA) and the solid waste districts are currently working with the Product Stewardship Council to educate retailers and further implement a paint stewardship initiative where paint may be returned to the point of purchase. Currently, legislative research has received documents and will move forward with writing a paint stewardship bill. While the bill has a legislative

sponsor, additional sponsors are needed.

Since the Missouri Department of Natural Resources Scrap Tire program was eliminated in April of 2016, an MRPC grant project has financially assisted counties in the Ozark Rivers district, at a cost of \$37,386, with transporting and recycling 194 tons (17,420 tires) of illegally dumped tires collected by county road crews.

Through the Ozark Rivers Solid Waste Management District's grant program, MRPC has organized 60 special waste collections since April 2003. These subsidized collections have recycled 543.71 tons of residential electronics, appliances and tires. It is of vital importance for every county to host a special collection to help reduce the occurrence and costs of illegal dumping and clean-up.

In the early 2000s, a region-wide survey was completed for illegal dumps in the region. As a follow-up to that survey, MRPC secured funds from USDA Rural Development to implement a dump cleanup program. This project takes a watershed approach by educating the public on how illegal dumping can endanger water resources. Since 2004, more than 147 dump sites have been cleaned up, partnerships have been built and the region-wide survey has been updated. In doing so, an estimated 917 tons of trash has been removed and properly disposed; and 19,406 tires have been collected for recycling. The district has recruited 1,716 volunteers to assist with these cleanups. Through the efforts of many people and implementation of these vital programs, the ORSWMD continues to provide valuable services that improve the quality of life for area residents.

• Hazardous Materials Planning

MRPC provides staffing and administrative services for the Meramec Regional Emergency Planning Committee (MREPC), which is responsible for maintaining and updating the region's (excluding Pulaski County) hazardous materials response plan and Community Right-to-Know records. The MREPC also applies for training grants and coordinates educational opportunities for emergency responders and local elected officials in the region. In addition to applying for local emergency responder trainings, MREPC, with the help of MRPC, also completed commodity flow studies for Highways 47, 32, 42, 8, 100, 72, 63, 50, 19, 21, 28, 68, 89, 133, State Route A in Washington county and I-44 transportation corridors, as well as three railroads and all of the pipelines in the region.

• Homeland Security Program

In 2006, MRPC entered into a contract with the State Emergency Management Agency to provide planning and administrative support to the Region I Homeland Security Oversight Committee (HSOC). This local committee of volunteers is tasked with determining needs and recommending homeland security grant fund awards in the six-county region, which includes Crawford, Dent, Maries, Phelps, Pulaski and Laclede counties, and serving as a conduit between local emergency responders, local governments, schools and the state-level Homeland Security Advisory Committee. The state program is now operated through the Department of Public Safety-Office of Homeland Security.

When the relationship between MRPC and HSOC began in FY2005, the first grant awarded to the project was \$506,593. Since then, grant funds consistently decreased to as low as \$49,354 in FY2012, before it increased to \$106,494 in FY2014, but decreased again in FY2015 and FY2016 when it awarded MRPC with a \$90,497.47 grant each year. Between 2016 and 2018, Region I saw a slight increase in funding; unfortunately, the grant program has seen a decrease in funding from \$93,959.39 in FY2018, \$90,930.58 in FY2019 and \$90,963.60 in FY2020. As fiscal agent and regional administrator, MRPC has fiscal responsibility for all grant funds and is responsible for all procurement and payment of

vendors and coordinating quarterly and special meetings of the local HSOC.

From that grant program, MRPC was awarded funds to continue training CERT teams in each of the six counties and to purchase a new ID badge printer and software for the use of county first responders. In 2019-2020, MRPC coordinated one Community Emergency Response Training (CERT), provided badges to local emergency response agencies, and worked with the State Emergency Management Agency area coordinator to plan regional exercises.

• **Hazard Mitigation Planning**

In 2019, MRPC began working to update the Pulaski and Phelps counties' Hazard Mitigation Plans (HMP), using grant funds through the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) and county funds. The Pulaski County hazard mitigation plan has been submitted and is being reviewed by SEMA and FEMA. The purpose of this plan is to help jurisdictions become less vulnerable to natural hazards such as tornadoes, flooding and winter storms. To be eligible for hazard mitigation grants, counties must maintain a current plan, which means updating every five years.

• **HUD Housing Choice Voucher Program**

In 1976, MRPC began operating the HUD Section 8 Housing Program through the Phelps County Public Housing Agency. The program provides very-low income families with greater access to decent, safe and affordable housing in the six original counties. (Osage County is served through the Boone County housing agency. Pulaski County is served by Missouri Ozarks Community Action, Inc.) Through the Housing Choice Voucher program in FY2019-20, MRPC assisted, on average, 735 families each month by providing over \$3 million in rental assistance for the year. PHA staff also performed 1,155 tenant inspections.

• **HUD Section 8 Homeownership**

In 2006, the Phelps County PHA, which is administered by MRPC, began the Section 8 Homeownership Program. The homeownership program allows first-time homeowners to use their voucher subsidy to meet their monthly mortgage payment and other homeownership expenses. Clients have purchased homes in Phelps and Crawford counties. Laclede, Franklin and Pulaski counties allow the Phelps County PHA to administer the program in their counties. To date, 25 homes have been purchased by clients through the Section 8 Homeownership program.

• **Family Self-Sufficiency**

The HUD Family Self-Sufficiency program, administered by MRPC through the Phelps County Public Housing Agency, empowers participants to become free of welfare assistance. Once a participant signs up, a housing/FSS coordinator aids that participant in assessing current and future needs, then assists in the development of an action plan. This plan will enable the family to reach the ultimate goal of self-sufficiency. Participants are contacted frequently to ensure they progress toward their goals. Employment and enrollment in vocational training or post-secondary education, which leads to higher paying professional positions, is encouraged for participants.

The FSS program also offers an incentive program that establishes an escrow account in the participant's name. As a participant pays more in rent, HUD makes a contribution equal to the increase in the portion of the rent paid by the participant. This savings account has the potential to grow into thousands of dollars. Upon successful completion of the contract, this money is paid to the participant. Of the 79

families in the FSS program, 29 families have escrow accounts, totaling \$71,580. In FY 2019-20, 11 clients successfully completed their FSS contracts and received their escrow accounts, which had a combined total of \$60,134.

• **Naturally Meramec Consortium**

MRPC continues to work with the Naturally Meramec Consortium in the eight-county region to promote local agri-tourism businesses and producers/buyers in the region. This project is funded through USDA. The Meramec Region has a plethora of options for tourists visiting the region and the consortium works to ensure the region is a destination spot for potential and returning visitors through online and print advertising on social media and in magazines such as Missouri Life. The consortium strives to increase the use of products and services to grow jobs and to be a destination where visitors stay for more than a day. This year, MRPC finished a food hub feasibility study that will help to connect local producers and buyers. Additionally, the consortium coordinated entrepreneurial workshops, one MO Extension training, and established five regional agri-tourism trails for the website (www.naturallymeramec.org).

• **MRPC Rural Opioid Initiatives**

The Meramec Region's Opioid Affected Youth Initiative was awarded funding in October 2019 for all eight counties in the Meramec Region through a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. The consortium was solidified in February 2020, and is comprised of stakeholders from the region, including approximately 12 professionals from healthcare and behavioral health organizations. The consortium advised MRPC project staff on the needs, resources and data from the region as it pertains to opioid misuse.

The Meramec Rural Opioid Program was awarded funding in September 2018 for Phelps, Maries, Crawford and Dent Counties through a grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration. The consortium has begun work in the community to help educate and inform the public of the effects of opioids and how/where to seek help. In August 2020, MRPC began teaching the "Seeking Safety" curriculum to the Maries County jail residents where they learned coping mechanisms to help them deal with addiction and trauma in their daily lives. Additional work includes partnering with Invent Yourself, LLC to work with inmates in regional jails and local recovery groups on recovery, resumes, and entering the workforce once released.

• **Services to Local Governments**

Ordinance Codification: Since 1975, MRPC has provided ordinance codification services to cities - including Rolla, Potosi, Vienna, Newburg, Cuba, Bland, and Freeburg - for a fee. Staff prepare an electronic version of all ordinances, indexes and tracks their history and updates them on a schedule selected by the city. MRPC also makes the ordinances available online for the ease of residents, contractors and developers.

Floodplain Management: MRPC serves as the floodplain coordinator for two counties and one city. Staff handles public awareness and outreach and processes floodplain permit requests in Phelps and Maries counties and the City of Meta.

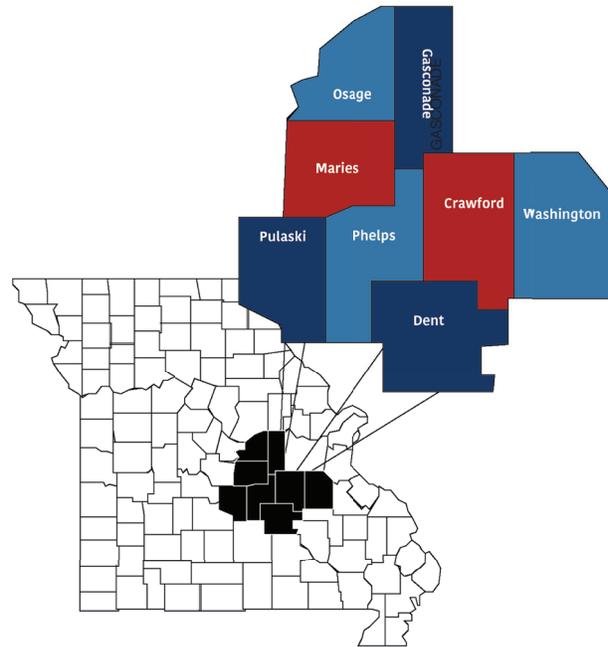
Inspection Services: MRPC offers lead, mold and asbestos inspection services to its member governments and private industry. MRPC also assists the city of Belle and Bland with code enforcement issues, under contract.

Meramec Region Facts

The Meramec Region is an eight-county area located in the southeast-central portion of Missouri. The area covers over 5,131 square miles and includes 36 municipalities. 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.

General Demographics

In 2019, the eight-county Meramec Region was home to 198,743 people, reflecting a decrease of 2,511 people from the 2010 decennial census. Individual 2019 estimates county populations range from a low of 8,803 in Maries County to 52,425 in Pulaski County. Pulaski County saw a decrease of .01 percent in the 2015-19 American Community Survey (ACS) from the 2014-18 ACS. However, all counties in the region, except for Pulaski, showed a decrease in population as reported in the 2015-19 ACS compared to the 2010 census data. From 2015-2019, the state of Missouri is estimated to have grown by only .24 percent.



The largest city in the region continues to be Rolla, the county seat of Phelps County. It has 20,169 people by 2019 estimates, up from 19,559 in 2010. The smallest city is Morrison in Gasconade County with 85 residents.

The region's population in 2019 showed slightly more males than females, just as it did in 2010. The region's median age in 2019 was 40.4 years, which is slightly older than the median age in the state and nation. The median age in the region has been steadily increasing.

The region is predominantly white with a 10.3 percent minority population. This is up from 9.2 percent in 2010. Pulaski County is the region's most racially diverse county. It is home to the Department of Defense's Fort Leonard Wood.

Income, Poverty and Unemployment

Incomes in the Meramec Region continue to be lower than the state or nation. The region's median income, based on 2019 Census infor-

Demographics 2018

Population.....	198,743
Male.....	52.6%
Female.....	47.4%
White.....	89.7%
Black.....	3.9%
Asian.....	.1.6%
American Indian.....	0.6%
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific.....	0.2%
Some Other Race.....	1.0%
Two or More Races.....	3%

Source: 2019 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis

mation, was \$48,726. The state median income was \$55,461 while the U.S. median income was \$62,843.

The region's median income is 87.9 percent of the state's rate and only 77.5 percent of the nation's rate. The majority of families in Missouri and families in the nation make \$35,000 or more a year, as well as the majority of the families in the Meramec Region, according to 2019 ACS data.

The region's poverty rate also runs higher than the state and nation's. Meramec residents living in poverty in 2019 numbered 31,388, which represents 15.8 percent of the population. This is an increase from 2018's 17.3 percent, but still higher than the state and national percentage, which both decreased in 2019. Some 13.3 percent of all Missouri residents live in poverty while 13.1 percent of all U.S. residents were living in poverty in 2019.

Median Household Incomes	
Meramec Region	\$48,726
Missouri	\$55,461
U.S.....	\$62,843
Region as % of State.....	87.9%
Region as % of Nation.....	77.5%

Source: 2019 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis

Household Income	
Households in the region.....	73,273
Under \$10,000.....	8.2%
\$10,000-14,999	6.1%
\$15,000-24,999	11.7%
\$25,000-34,999	10.7%
\$35,000 & over	63.4%

Source: 2019 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis

Persons in Poverty	
Meramec Region	15.8%
Missouri	13.3%
U.S.....	13.1%

Source: 2019 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis

Population by Age	
Under 5.....	5.8%
0-17	22%
18 & Over	78%
65+	15.6%
Median Age.....	40.4 years

Source: 2019 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis

Phelps County had the highest poverty rate in the region with 19.2 percent. The lowest was Osage County with 7.2 percent.

The region, for several decades, has been plagued with high unemployment rates. Washington and Dent counties experienced mine closings while other counties lost shoe and textile manufacturers. However, for the past few years the region has seen decreases to their unemployment rates. Despite COVID-19 layoffs, the November 2020 unemployment rate for the region was 3.6 percent, slightly lower than the state average at 3.9 percent, but higher than the 3.4 percent in 2019. The U.S. average for Jan.-Nov. 2020 was 7.9 percent. This is a good sign for the region as far as employment is concerned, especially during a pandemic.

Unemployment	
Employed	76,924
Unemployed	2,908
Total Labor Force.....	79,832
Region's unemployment rate.....	3.6%
State's unemployment rate.....	3.9%
U.S. unemployment rate.....	6.4%

*All data compiled with Nov. 2020 data.
Source: Missouri Department of Economic Development, MRPC

Housing

The Meramec Region has 89,276 total housing units with 73,273 occupied, according to the 2019 ACS five-year estimates. The average number of individuals per unit in the region is 2.45 people, which is slightly higher than the state average of 2.41 people.

The number of occupied housing units in the region appears to be increasing, as there were 72,388 in 2018 and 73,273 in 2019.

Of the 73,273 occupied units, 48,963 are owner occupied while 24,310 are renter occupied, according to the 2019 ACS five-year estimates. In 2018, the median value of a home in the region was \$129,400, compared to a state average of \$157,200. The average monthly rent for a home in the region in 2019 was \$646.75 while the state average was \$830. The majority of the housing stock — 78.5 percent — was built in 1960 or later, as indicated by the 2019 ACS five year estimates.

Education Levels	
2019 percent of adults 25 years and older with at least a high school diploma.	
Meramec Region	86%
Missouri	89.9%
U.S.....	88%
Source: 2019 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis	

Education Levels

Some 86 percent of the region’s population aged 25 and older have at least a high school diploma, according to the 2019 ACS five-year estimates. This percentage is 3.9 percent less than the state and 2 percent less than the U.S. When compared to the 2010 percentage of 81.6 percent, the region improved in the percentage of adults 25 years and older who had at least a high school diploma by 4.4 percent.

The region’s most educated county in 2019 was Pulaski, with 92.8 percent of adults with high school diplomas or higher education level.

The Economy

Over the years, the region has diversified its economy—after taking hard hits in the mining and textile industries 25 to 35 years ago. In the region, services was the largest employment sector with

Housing at a Glance	
Number of housing units in region..	89,276
Number occupied	73,273
Number owner occupied.....	48,963
Number renter occupied.....	24,310
Vacant units	16,003
Persons per unit in region	2.45
Persons per unit in state	2.41
Median value in region	\$129,400
Median value in state.....	\$157,200
Median monthly rent in region	\$646.75
Median monthly rent in state	\$830
Housing units in region	
built before 1939.....	8,235
Housing units in region	
built 1940-59.....	10,968
Housing units in region	
built 1960-1979.....	22,399
Housing units in region	
built 1980-99.....	27,212
Housing units in region	
built 2000 and after.....	20,462
Source: 2019 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis	

over 36,000 employees, followed by manufacturing and retail trade.

Health care, education and social assistance is the highest employment industry in the region with 20,392 employees, which makes up 25.7 percent of employment in the region, according to 2019 ACS five-year estimates.

The number of manufacturing firms in the region has decreased slightly.

The 2020 Missouri Directory of Manufacturers listed 473 manufacturing firms in the region, compared to 479 in 2019.

The major public employer in the region is Fort Leonard Wood with more than 12,000 day-time jobs followed by the Missouri University of Science and Technology with 2,000 full-time and part-time employees and Phelps County Regional

Medical Center with more than 1,700 employees. The region's top major private employer is Quaker Window Products with 800 plus employees. It is located in Maries and Osage counties.

While the number of jobs in the region increases, many residents still travel outside their home county to work outside the region.

Transportation

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 as 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 Waynesville-St. Robert Regional Airport at Forney Field in Pulaski County is located on the Fort Leonard Wood military base and is accessible to the public. The airport is the only one in the region featuring an air traffic control tower.

The Rolla National Airport, located at Vichy and operated by the city of Rolla, and the Sullivan Airport, operated by the city of Sullivan, are defined as B-2 airports and are used primarily by airplanes with approach speeds up to 120 knots and wingspans up to 79 feet. Other airports in the region—Washington County, Salem, Cuba, Owensville, Hermann and State Technical College of Missouri at Linn—are classified as B-1s, which means they serve airplanes with approach speeds up to 120 knots and wingspans up to 49 feet.

Three railways serve the region. Burlington Northern operates the most miles of track in the re-

Regional Industrial Employment

Employed persons 16 and over.....	79,370
Agriculture, forestry, fishing & hunting, & mining	1,964
Construction	5,283
Manufacturing.....	10,546
Transportation/warehousing & utilities	3,432
Wholesale trade.....	1,167
Retail trade	10,403
Information.....	1,062
Finance, insurance, real estate & rental/leasing	2,886
Professional, scientific, mgmt., admin. & waste mgmt. ser.	4,839
Educational, health & social ser.....	20,392
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation & food ser.....	7,549
Other services	3,449
Public Administration	6,398

Source: 2019 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis

gion. That rail line follows the general route of I-44 through Crawford, Phelps and Pulaski counties.

Rail service in the region is not as prevalent as it once was. Several miles of the former Rock Island rail have been neglected since the early 1990s. In 2015, Missouri Central Railroad railbanked the line and is awaiting a decision from Missouri State Parks to accept the abandoned rail bed into the state system. The development of a walking and biking trail is on hold until such decision.

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.

Meramec Regional planning Commission's Board of Commissioners

CRAWFORD COUNTY

Debbie Martin, representing the mayor of Cuba
Kyle Hofstetter, representing for-profit
Jared West, chairman of Leasburg
Mary Heywood, representing the unemployed
Margie Brine, representing the mayor of Bourbon
Terry Beckham, mayor of Steelville
Leo Sanders, presiding commissioner

DENT COUNTY

Earl Brown, representing people with disabilities
Ray Walden, representing the mayor of Salem
Marcus Maggard, representing tourism
Darrell Skiles, presiding commissioner
Robert Parsons, representing Farming/Agri Business
Gary Brown, representing for-profit

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Mark Farran, representing the mayor of Bland
Shannon Grus, mayor of Rosebud
John Kamler, mayor of Owensville
Debbie Green, mayor of Gasconade
Jason Koenigsfeld, representing the mayor of Morrison
Ron Kraettli, representing for-profit
Mark Wallace, representing the mayor of Hermann

MARIES COUNTY

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Ray Schwartze, representing for-profit
Vic Stratman, presiding commissioner
Steve Vogt, mayor of Belle

OSAGE COUNTY

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Dr. Don Claycomb, representing education
Tammy Massman, mayor of Westphalia
Harold Libbert, mayor of Meta
Darryl Griffin, presiding commissioner

Darryl Haller, chairman of Freeburg
Jan Haviland, representing industry
Dwight Massey, mayor of Linn
Chris Brundick, chairman of Argyle
Elise Brochu, mayor of Chamois

PHELPS COUNTY

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Terry Austin, mayor of Edgar Springs
Jeff Medows, representing for-profit
Rick Elder, representing the mayor of Newburg
Tom Coots, representing the mayor of Rolla
John Meusch, representing lending institutions
Doug Smith, mayor of Doolittle
Shane Anselm, representing labor
Randy Verkamp, presiding commissioner
Janet Walker, representing minorities
Jim Fleming, representing the mayor of St. James

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Michael Dunbar, representing for-profit
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Jerry Brown, mayor of Waynesville
Glen Smith, mayor of Crocker
Gene Newkirk, presiding commissioner
George Lauritson, mayor of St. Robert
Dana Tanner, mayor of Richland

WASHINGTON COUNTY

Kraig Bone, representing emergency management
Debby Bust, representing for-profit
John Casey, representing transportation
Joseph Blount, mayor of Potosi
Tom Degonia, chairman of Mineral Point
Doris Keim, mayor of Irondale
John Robinson III, chairman of Caledonia
Dave Sansegraw, presiding commissioner
Laurel Boisonault, representing small business

2021 MRPC Leadership

Board & Staff

Chairman:Larry Miskel, Presiding Commissioner of Gasconade County
Vice Chairman:Steve Vogt, City of Belle
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Fiscal Officer:Linda Loughridge
Environmental Programs Manager:Tammy Snodgrass
Project Development Manager:Kelly Sink
Housing Programs Manager:Donald Keeney
Planning Manager:Anne Freand

2021 Associate Members

PLATINUM MEMBERS

Legends Bank
Pulaski County Sewer District #1

GOLD MEMBERS

Town & Country Bank - Salem

SILVER MEMBERS

Argyle Catering
Southern Bank
Gascosage Electric Cooperative
Investment Reality
Maries County Bank
State Technical College of Missouri
Kenagy Law Office

EXCHANGE MEMBERS

St. James Chamber of Commerce
Salem Area Chamber of Commerce
Waynesville-St. Robert Chamber of
Commerce
Washington County Chamber of Commerce

2021

State Priorities in the
Meramec Region



*A voluntary council of local governments
serving the Meramec Region*

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT

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