

ABOUT MRPC

MRPC is a voluntary council of local governments serving the Meramec area of Missouri since 1969. The area includes the eight counties of Crawford, Dent, Gasconade, Maries, Osage, Phelps, Pulaski and Washington and their respective cities.

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.

Members of the Meramec Region’s Congressional Delegation:

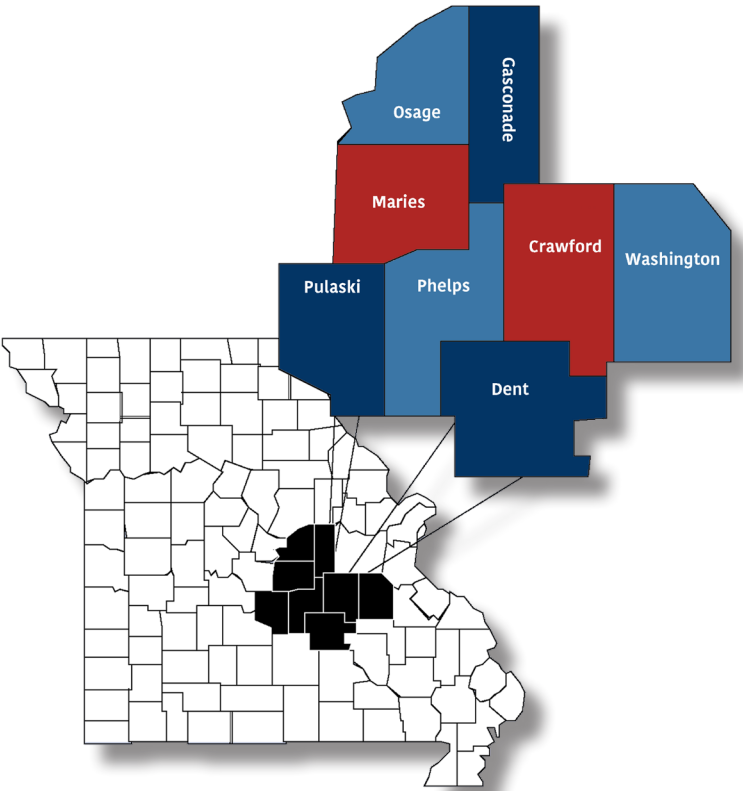
The Honorable Sens. Roy Blunt and Josh Hawley
Reps. Blaine Luetkemeyer, Vicky Hartzler and Jason Smith

The Meramec Regional Planning Commission, representing eight counties and their respective cities, is pleased to present its 2022 Federal Priorities agenda to you. In addition to our specific priorities, our board encourages fiscal responsibility and asks that Congress achieve a balanced budget. We encourage efforts that create jobs and offer grant funding for rural areas, like ours. We look forward to working with you, and we thank you in advance for your consideration of our 2022 Federal Priorities.

Sincerely,

Steve Vogt
MRPC Chairman

Bonnie J. Prigge
Executive Director



Meramec Regional Planning Commission
4 Industrial Drive
St. James, Mo 65559
Phone: (573) 265-2993
Fax: (573) 265-3550
Executive Director: Bonnie Prigge
meramecregion.org
www.facebook.com/meramecregion

This report was distributed by MRPC to the Meramec Region’s federal delegation.

A collage of four images: a construction site with a crane, a group of people in a meeting, the MRPC logo, and a group of people holding protest signs.

Federal Priorities in the Missouri Meramec Region

2022 Congressional Issues

Prepared by:
Meramec Regional Planning Commission
4 Industrial Drive | St. James, Mo 65559
www.meramecregion.org

COVID-19 RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Support passage of Senate Amendment S.3011 - the State, Local, Tribal and Territorial Fiscal Recovery, Infrastructure and Disaster Relief Flexibility Act which provides significant flexibility for the \$350 billion Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (ARPA Funds). This act must still go through the House and be signed by the President. The following provisions constitute a major shift in the way counties can spend ARPA funds:
 - Allow counties to allocate not greater than \$10 million and or 30 percent for infrastructure- related activities authorized under existing federal surface transportation laws or a Community Development Block Grant project;
 - Allow counties to use ARPA funds to provide emergency relief from natural disasters and their negative economic impacts, including temporary emergency housing, food assistance, financial assistance for lost wages, or other immediate needs;
 - Extends the deadline to utilize relief funding if budgeted for eligible infrastructure projects through September 2026; and
 - Within 60 days of enactment of S. 3011, the Secretary of Treasury and Secretary of Transportation must issue guidance or promulgate rule to carry out the amendments, including updating the reporting requirements.

HEALTH CARE & SOCIAL SERVICES:

- Continue to fund quality health care for the uninsured, underinsured and the underserved population in the region.
- Support full administrative funding for public housing agencies. Housing assistance programs provide safe, modest, affordable housing for veterans, the disabled and the elderly. These programs help maintain the quality of housing in communities by establishing and enforcing housing quality standards, which benefit not only the families served, but the communities as well. The Housing Choice Voucher administrative fee has been reduced for over a decade and is currently at 80 percent of the original funding. This funding reduction has been initiated with no reduction in the administrative burden. Underfunding of administration is resulting in public housing agencies struggling to effectively meet the needs of their respective communities and efficiently meet the regulatory requirements of the programs they coordinate. In order to continue to provide these much-needed services, full administrative funding must be restored.
- Encourage Medicare and private care groups (BCBS, etc.) to increase preventative services, which in turn, would address the gap to reduce the impact on hospitals and ERs. In addition, if Medicare posted/set pricing on services, others would follow suit.

ENVIRONMENT:

- Continue to support and protect our national parks, monuments, wildlife reserves and public lands — which are held in trust for the American people — for the enjoyment and economic benefit of future generations. There must be a balance maintained in the appropriate use and maintenance of these lands (through grazing and timber harvest) that benefits local communities as well as the general public without inflicting environmental damage.
- In an effort to reduce food waste and provide food for food banks and other charitable food donation programs, provide tax reduction incentive for food-service companies and farms to donate surplus food that would otherwise be discarded. Because donated food inventory must be properly saved, packaged, labeled and stored, the tax reduction incentive would allow food service companies to incur and offset these costs, helping provide a vital service to community food pantries and other tax-exempt organizations.

ENERGY:

- Continue to work toward energy independence. Encourage research of other crops to develop new sources of energy rather than using food products like corn and soybeans. Explore environmentally friendly ways of drilling for oil and use them. Pursue oil shale while exploring solar, wind and biomass conversion energy, hydro-electric, co-generation energy and expand nuclear energy production.
- Encourage construction and use of nuclear power with safe, economical disposal of spent fuel. In particular, continue to support research and development of small modular nuclear reactors.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ISSUES:

- Eliminate unfunded federal mandates, such as federal expectations and wastewater/stormwater regulations, to states or provide funding options/opportunities to states and/or local governments to fully fund them.
- Preserve the current tax exemption for municipal bonds. Tax-exempt financing, used by both state and local governments to raise funds to finance public capital improvements, is critical to sustain economic growth. Currently the senate finance committee is considering eliminating the tax exemption for municipal bonds as part of tax reform.
- Continue mandatory funding for Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program and Secure Rural Schools Act and make the use of these funds more flexible. These payments made to local governments to cover the loss of tax income on federal lands. Several of our member counties have large amounts of Federal lands including National Forest and National Park Service lands.

EDUCATION:

- Support technical training initiatives, such as the MO Wins and MO Health Wins programs, for our labor force. This could be in the form of more incentives for schools to provide access to more intensive technical classes or assistance for people to attend a two-year program, including satellite classes.
- Encourage greater emphasis on reading, writing, math and science competency. Also encourage the emphasis of reading and writing as they relate to STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics).

TRANSPORTATION:

- Encourage federal funding for improvements to Highways 63 and 50, which are the region’s top two transportation priorities and are identified as freight routes in the Missouri State Freight Plan, in the Meramec Region.
- Work with Federal Highway Administration to include low water crossings as eligible for funding or change the definition of a “bridge” to include low water crossings.
- Improve public transportation opportunities.

HOMELAND SECURITY & EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS:

- Build upon the experience, capacity and skills of regional planning commissions to coordinate, plan and implement homeland security and emergency preparedness activities on a regional basis and allow local decision-making.
- Changes need to be made to the current floodplain buyout process. We submitted six properties for a buyout under the Flood Mitigation Program (FMA) grant program. The guidelines for the grant application stated that only properties that were insured through the NFIP at the time of the flood were eligible. it was not made clear at this point in the process that those same properties had to maintain flood insurance throughout the grant submittal process and up to the date of acquisition. three of the six properties that were submitted and approved by FEMA did not maintain their flood insurance. In two cases the homes were completely destroyed and continued insurance was denied based on their current condition. This requirement was not made clear until two years after the grants were submitted when the acquisition process was underway. Three properties were removed from the buyout. This requirement does not make sense. Eliminate the requirement of maintaining insurance after a structure is substantially damaged or destroyed. The end goal is to remove families and structures from the floodplain and flood-prone areas.

ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:

- Make adjustments to Davis/Bacon Act that will allow small, rural communities to waive prevailing wage requirements for all projects costing less than \$250,000.
- Advocate for and fully fund the existing portfolio of federal community and economic development programs, most notably the Economic Development Administration’s (EDA’s) infrastructure, economic adjustment assistance and district planning grant programs and HUD’s Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. Delta Regional Authority (DRA) and Small Business Administration (SBA) business lending programs. Rural areas depend heavily on these programs for infrastructure improvements. Specifically:
 - Reauthorize and fully fund EDA, and include (1) A provision that planning grants will be increased if appropriations are increased and (2) A provision that would lower the local government cost share on grants,
 - Fully fund USDA rural development grant programs for infrastructure improvements, businesses development, community facilities, housing and broadband services.
- Provide incentives for small developers to provide affordable housing in rural areas. Most incentive programs are for large developers. We need to encourage residential and commercial development in rural areas.
- Continue to support Fort Leonard Wood using the results of the FLW Joint Land Use Study and Missouri’s Military Infrastructure Report. This base is an economic engine that puts over \$2 billion annually into the Missouri economy.

