



MRPC

2023 State Priorities in the Meramec Region

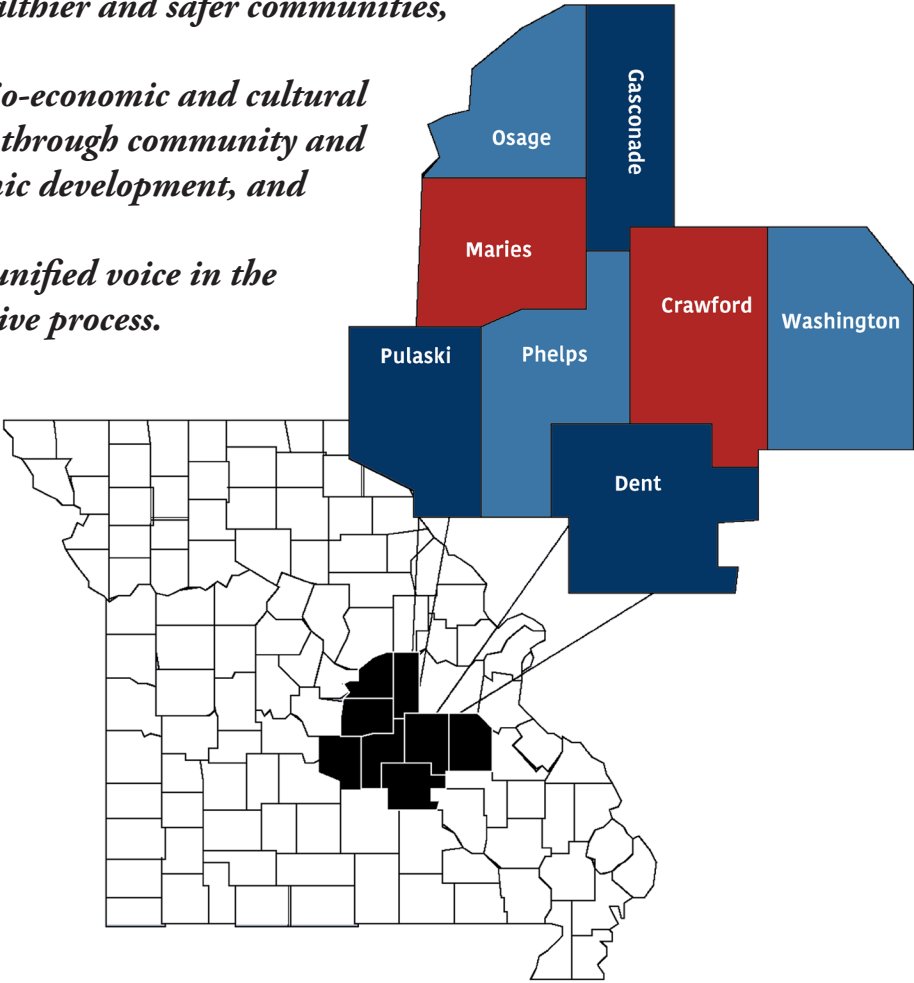
An Issues Report For the Region's Legislative Delegation

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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.

2023 STATE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES IN THE MERAMEC REGION

As the 2023 legislative session begins, the board of the Meramec Regional Planning Commission would like to share with you issues 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 funding for additional improvements to the Highway 63 corridor.
2. Continue support and funding for upgrades of bridge replacement projects.
3. Increased funding and more locally equitable match component for the MoDOT cost-share program, perhaps allowing for an in-kind match component with less match required for cost-share programs in rural areas.
4. Support lowering speed limits on county gravel roads to 40 mph.

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

1. Increase funding and opportunities for workforce training and apprenticeships to address critical shortages in key areas of the economy, including healthcare, advanced manufacturing and technology, truck drivers and skilled trades such as carpenters, plumbers, electricians, HVAC workers, mechanics, etc.
2. Increased and equitable funding opportunities for rural tourism efforts such as the Naturally Meramec initiative and other coordinated and viable organizations. Support funding for fixed tourism assets such as buildings or other construction projects, that would attract tourists (development of the Rock Island Trail). Currently state tourism dollars are used only for ads, literature and commercials.
3. Increase funding opportunities for critical infrastructure improvements, especially failing systems in rural and impoverished areas.
4. Fully support Fort Leonard Wood and recognize that it is an economic development engine for Missouri.

ENVIRONMENTAL:

1. Provide additional funding for the regional solid waste management districts in order to provide more local grant funds and expansion of recycling, waste reduction and reuse programs for citizens. Address critical landfill shortages by incentivizing recycling and reuse opportunities; consider increasing tipping fees to bring funding back to local area via solid waste management districts.
2. Support additional funding for market development of recycled products. Creating more markets for recovered materials will help make recycling programs more sustainable and create jobs.
3. Provide financial resources for residents to upgrade or replace failing on-site wastewater systems, with special consideration given to low income and impoverished individuals and families. On-site wastewater treatment systems are utilized for 25% of Missouri homes and according to the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, many of those systems are failing and inadequately monitored, especially in

critical watershed areas. Provide additional funding to DNR and county health departments for more comprehensive oversight.

HEALTH CARE/SOCIAL SERVICE:

1. Provide support for improved access to telehealth services through expansion and improvement of broadband infrastructure and increase reimbursement rates for tele-medicine encounters so it becomes a viable treatment option, especially in rural areas.
2. Assure adequate funding for rural hospitals and realize their importance not only to regional healthcare but also to local economies.
3. Provide adequate funding, access and resources for behavioral health services, such as substance abuse and mental health issues; continue to establish crisis centers; establish additional treatment facilities throughout the state, to address the growing substance abuse and mental health issues plaguing our communities - especially ones that would be accessible regionally in rural areas. Continue to adequately fund the Department of Mental Health as well as the Department of Public Safety, Family Services Division and Health and Senior Services.

EDUCATION:

1. Support post-secondary education in trades, i.e. technical schools and community colleges, as well as vocational and job training programs.
2. Provide adequate funding for rural school districts, especially those in impoverished areas. State should pay the same amount per student statewide.
3. Support school district efforts to acquire substitute teachers – an on-going issue in most school districts. (Options could include providing additional pay and requiring less in college hours.)

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (CITY/COUNTY):

1. Lower grant match requirements for grants – especially State ARPA grants to very small, rural communities. A 50-percent match on a \$500,000 project is too costly for small communities to provide. They are not able to apply for many grant programs because the match requirement is out of reach. Such a high match requirement excludes our rural communities to a large degree.
2. Support the addition of prosecuting attorney and sheriff to the list of county level positions paid for by the State. Missouri currently pays the salary for circuit clerk and recorder. The state legislature mandated these salary increases but has not provided funding to cover the increased cost. Therefore, MRPC recommends the state cover these salaries as it does the circuit clerk and recorder salary.
3. Eliminate unfunded mandates.
4. Support the expansion of water and sewer infrastructure grants.
5. Support increased funding for regional planning commissions by updating funding caps within legislation created in 1965.

GENERAL:

1. Support the development of additional day care options throughout the state. Many people have not returned to the workforce because they are not able to find daycare for their children.
2. Promote tourism and businesses through greater incentives and tax breaks in order to make Missouri more attractive to other states.
3. Support adoption and ways to streamline and expedite the adoption process and reduce financial costs to adopting families.

Highlights of 2022 Accomplishments

MRPC's Impact

The Meramec Regional Planning Commission had a strong year in 2021-22. Working with various state and federal agencies, MRPC was able to continue implementation on 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. MRPC continued to adapt to work in the midst of a pandemic ensuring that program objectives moved forward and our cities, counties and regions had access to the services and programs they required.

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 six meetings in 2021-22. 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) and its list of high-priority unfunded needs. 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 completed a road safety audit for the intersection of Hwy. 21 and Robart Road in Washington County. Through MoDOT, MRPC staff also worked with the Coalition for Roadway Safety with the goal of reducing fatalities in the region through awareness efforts. Staff continued working on three transportation-related projects - Newburg (street reconstruction), Washington County (bridge replacement) and Washington County IDA (upgrade Ameren Road and Development Drive and extend the water main through the industrial park). MRPC secured grants totaling \$1,122,182 to advance these local transportation 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 2021-22, \$2.5 million in federal and state grant monies flowed through the planning and development department for community and economic development projects. In FY 2021-22, staff assisted member communities with the following funding opportunities:

- HUD Lead Hazard Reduction Grant for MRPC to test and remediate homes within the region (Funded);
- USDA Rural Development's Community Facilities program for the city of Crocker Development Corporation to acquire a compact track loader, which is necessary equipment to continue improvements of city ditches, roadways and properties (Pending);
- National Endowment for the Arts American Rescue Plan Grants for Communities for Dixon R-1 to pay the salary of the band/music teacher (Not Funded);
- MDNR's VW Trust Fund for Washington County Highway Department to replace a 1993 dump truck with a 2023 dump truck (Not Funded);
- MDNR's VW Trust Fund for Washington County Highway Department to replace a 2003 dump truck with a 2023 dump truck (Not Funded);
- MDNR's VW Trust Fund for Washington County Highway Department to replace a 1999 dump truck with a 2023 dump truck (Funded);
- MDNR's VW Trust Fund for Washington County Highway Department to replace a 2005 dump truck with a 2023 dump truck (Funded);
- MDNR's VW Trust Fund for Osage County Road and Bridge to replace a 2004 dump truck with a 2022 dump truck (Not Funded);
- MoDED's Neighborhood Assistance Program for St. James Senior Center to raise funds that will allow the senior center to expand food, health, social and educational programs for three years using tax credits (Funded);
- MoDED's Neighborhood Assistance Program for Richland Community Development Corporation to raise funds to install 25 lights in downtown as Phase III of Richland After Dark Initiative using tax credits (Not Funded);
- MoDED's Neighborhood Assistance Program for Phelps Connections for Seniors, Inc. to renovate an existing building to accommodate a senior center that will provide multiple services under one roof using tax credits (Not Funded);
- EDA's American Rescue Plan Act Economic Adjustment Assistance program for the city of Owensville to realign Springfield Road to facilitate the expansion of LSC Communications and improve commercial truck traffic access to industrial park (Not Funded);
- MoDED's Community Development Block Grant Wastewater program for Gasconade County to upgrade its wastewater treatment facility by installing an oxidation ditch and UV disinfection (Funded);
- EDA's ARPA Travel, Tourism and Outdoor Recreation program for MRPC to complete a feasibility study on a sports complex to diversify the tourism base in Pulaski County (Not Funded);
- FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Program for North Wood R-IV School District in Dent County to construct a multi-purpose building that will serve as the school district's tornado safe room (Pending);
- EDA's Tourism, Travel and Outdoor Recreation program for Washington County to convert a vacant lot into an amphitheater and park for events (Not Funded);
- Missouri Department of Public Safety's Local Law Enforcement Block Grant for Steelville Police Department to purchase vehicle safety equipment and officer body cameras (Pending);
- FEMA's Assistance to Firefighters Grant for Jadwin Volunteer Fire Department to replace 1967 and 1976 pumper and brush vehicles with a new brush attack vehicle with pumper (Pending);

- FEMA's Assistance to Firefighters Grant for Jadwin Volunteer Fire Department to purchase 8 SCBAs and 17 full turnout gear (Pending);
- Federal Highway Administration's Federal Lands Access Program for Crawford County to upgrade pavement on Eagle Hurst Road from Highway 8 to Brickey Bridge serving the Mark Twain National Forest (Not Funded);
- FEMA's Assistance to Firefighters Grant for Rolla Fire and Rescue to purchase a new pumper truck with high capacity and flow (Pending);
- MoDED's Community Development Block Grants for the city of New Haven to restructure the roads of Circle Drive, Maiden Lane and Elton Street (Not Funded);
- Federal Highway Administration's Federal Lands Access Program for Dent County to pave County Road 6670 from Ozark National Scenic Riverways Tan Vat Access to the boundary of Montauk State Park (Funded);
- Federal Highway Administration's Federal Lands Access Program for Crawford County to replace Butts Road Bridge over Courtois Creek accessing Mark Twain National Forest (Funded);
- MoDED's Community Development Block Grants Community Facilities program for the city of Irondale to renovate the existing community building and add parking area and building addition (Not Funded);
- MDNR's Recreational Trails Program for the city of Belle to construct the section of the Rock Island Trail State Park that runs through city limits and add a trailhead near downtown (Funded);
- MDNR's Land and Water Conservation Fund for the city of Meta to create the Meta Elementary Memorial Park which will include a loop walking trail, benches, parking lot and basketball/pickleball court (Pending);
- MDNR's Recreational Trails Program for the city of Meta to create the Meta Elementary Memorial Park which will include a loop walking trail, benches, parking lot and basketball/pickleball court (Not Funded);
- MDNR's Land and Water Conservation Fund for Washington County to convert a vacant lot into the Towne Square Park, with an amphitheater, playground, waterwall and street-level pavilion (Pending);
- USDA Rural Development's Rural Business Development Grant for Intercounty Electric Cooperative Association for planning, environmental reviews and marketing plan for potential industrial site (Funded);
- MoDOT's Highway Safety Grant for MRPC to extend the existing bicycle and pedestrian safety education program another year (Funded);
- SEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program for the city of Pacific to acquire four properties through a flood buyout project and remove structures from the floodplain (Pending);
- MoDED's Neighborhood Assistance Program for Phelps Connections for Seniors, Inc. to renovate an existing building to operate a senior center with attached thrift store using tax credits (Funded);
- DRA's SEDAP 2022 for the village of Mineral Point to replace the low water crossing over Mill Creek that has deteriorated under continued flooding (Funded);
- DRA's SEDAP 2022 for Meramec Community Enhancement Corporation to assist Naturally Meramec with business development, marketing and business training (Funded);
- DOJ's COPS Hiring Program for Owensville Police Department to hire a full-time SRO for the

Gasconade R-II School District (Not Funded);

- DOJ's COPS Hiring Program for the Gasconade County Sheriff to hire three officers (Not Funded);
- Department of Health and Senior Services' Active Living Community of Practice program for the city of Belle to create an Active Transportation Plan to connect the Rock Island Trail with the rest of the community (Funded);
- Department of Health and Senior Services' Active Living Community of Practice program for the city of Rosebud to create an Active Transportation Plan to connect the Rock Island Trail with the rest of the community (Funded); and
- Women's Net's Amber Grant for Salon Legacy/Legacy Beauty Institute to use as equity for a commercial business loan to purchase property for a proposed cosmetology school (Not Funded).

Staff continued to disseminate funding information to member communities through grant alerts, workshops and community meetings. 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 maintaining 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 continues to work on an update to the resiliency portion of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which will be completed by June 2023. 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. By July 2021, all \$780,000 had been loaned to 10 businesses who created nearly 60 jobs. 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 1,326 jobs in the Meramec Region for an average investment of \$21,694 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 1,149 jobs at a cost of \$4,113 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 79 loans worth \$4.73 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.

MRPC's Lead Safe Program

A new program started in FY21-22 is MRPC's Lead Safe, a program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which kicked off in October 2021 with a total program budget of more than \$1.4 million. It's primarily a prevention program serving low-income families in the Meramec region with the mission of reducing childhood lead poisoning. MRPC's program is committed to evaluating 100 privately owned homes for lead paint hazards and completing 60 hazard remediation projects on those properties over the next three years. This service is completely free to the home's occupants. To date, four projects are out for bid with state licensed lead abatement contractors, and various families are in the process of submitting documentation to get enrolled in the program.

Staff have completed trainings and developed all the processes necessary to administer a program like this. MRPC is marketing the program to establish its presence in the region. Staff have attended health fairs, back to school events, and local festivals; collaborated with community resource provider coalitions; been interviewed by local radio stations; presented educational programs about the dangers of lead with parents at area Head Start meetings; distributed program applications at public offices, libraries, food pantries, health centers, medical clinics, and pre-school programs; advertised on social media; and issued press releases about the program.

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 194 grants, totaling \$3.47 million, to support local and regional projects. These grants have targeted businesses, local governments, schools and non-profits. The 2022 grant cycle provided funding for an anerobic digestion of cafeteria food waste, provided staff salary and equipment maintenance for a community-based recycling center, for a repurposing resource center, food prep course to help reduce food waste and a recycling program through Scenic Rivers. 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), increased collection of alkaline batteries by providing drop boxes in public spaces and educational programs for schools and community outreach and assistance. Each of these projects is consistent with the district's plan and goals.

In partnership with Ozark Rivers, MRPC has established two satellite HHW collection facilities, and they have been in operation in Rolla and St. Robert since 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 2.88 tons from 875 residents at an estimated cost of \$6,736.50 during 2022. This year, vape products were added to the list of acceptable wastes. Paint is a costly household waste to process. The Missouri Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) and state-wide solid waste districts are currently working with the Missouri Product Stewardship Council to implement a paint stewardship program where paint may be returned to the point of purchase. HB 2852, sponsored by Rep. Jamie Burger, proposed to establish a convenient and cost-effective paint collection and recycling program, operated by the paint industry, for Missouri residents and businesses. Each year, Missouri residents, businesses, and institutions generate an estimated 1.3 million gallons of leftover paint. If all this paint were managed properly through Missouri's household hazardous waste collections, it would cost more than \$12 million per year.

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 with transporting and recycling 225 tons (25,000 tires) of illegally dumped tires collected by county road crews. The cost to date is \$48,634.

Through the Ozark Rivers Solid Waste Management District's grant program, MRPC has organized 68 special waste collections since April 2003. These subsidized collections have recycled 650.34 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 189 dump sites have been cleaned up, partnerships have been built and the region-wide survey has been updated. In doing so, an estimated 984 tons of trash has been removed and properly disposed; and 20,004 tires have been collected for recycling. The district has recruited 1,810 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 Local Emergency Planning District (MLEPD), formerly the Meramec Regional Emergency Planning Committee, which is responsible for maintaining and updating the region's (excluding Pulaski County) hazardous materials response plan and Community Right-to-Know records. The MLEPD also applies for training grants and coordinates educational opportunities for emergency responders and local elected officials in the region. The group, with the help of MRPC, has 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. Since 2012, Region I has seen a fluctuation in awards funded, but in FY22 \$104,984.33 for a total of six grants. 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. The HSOC updated the Threat and Hazard Identification and Resiliency Assessment (THIRA).

From that grant program, MRPC was awarded funds to continue providing ID badges for the use of county first responders and added an additional online badge training. In 2021-2022, MRPC worked with Rolla Emergency Management/Fire Department and Waynesville Police Department to purchase MOSWIN capable radios and worked with the Office of Homeland Security to update inventory listings.

Hazard Mitigation Planning

In 2021, MRPC began working to update four county Hazard Mitigation Plans (HMP), using grant funds through the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) and matching county funds. The Crawford, Osage, and Washington counties hazard mitigation plans were adopted in late 2022. Dent County's plan is currently in the adoption process. Staff began work on the Maries county plan at the start of the year in 2023. The purpose of these plans 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 requires a plan update 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 FY2021-22, MRPC assisted, on average, 706 families each month by providing over \$3 million in rental assistance for the year. PHA staff also performed 1,123 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, 29 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 70 families in the FSS program, 24 families have escrow accounts, totaling a combined \$70,191.56. In FY 2021-22, six clients successfully completed their FSS contracts and received their escrow accounts, which had a combined total of \$27,707.81.

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 was funded through USDA and ended in September 2022. Additional funding for the FY22-23 and FY23-24 fiscal years has been obtained through DRA for the four-county (Phelps, Dent, Crawford and Washington) area. Ongoing work in the remaining four (Gasconade, Maries, Osage and Pulaski) counties will be supported through EDA funds. 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 community and county fair books. The consortium strives to increase the use of local products and services to grow jobs and to be a destination where visitors stay for more than a day. This year, MRPC hosted three "Taste Of County" events where local food producers were highlighted. Additionally, the consortium coordinated two entrepreneurial workshops, attended local fairs and events, and established a new regional agri-tourism trail 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. In Fiscal Year 2021-22, the OAYI initiative worked to provide "Too Good for Drugs" curriculum in Belle Elementary and High Schools, Cuba

Middle School, Newburg Middle School, Potosi Middle School, Rolla Elementary, Middle and High Schools, Salem Schools, St. James Elementary and High Schools, and Vienna Schools, coordinated two youth seeking safety programs in Linn, Rolla, and St. James, coordinated two Entrepreneurship, Innovation, and Opportunities: Breaking the Cycle of Opioid Misuse program, provided 331 backpacks to 11 regional Head Start programs full of essential care items and published two video testimonials with the Stories from Our Region - The Opioid Epidemic project.

The Meramec Rural Opioid Program was awarded funding in September 2018 for Phelps, Maries, Crawford and Dent Counties and the Meramec Region Recovery Alliance was awarded funding in September 2021 for Crawford, Dent, Gasconade, Maries, Phelps, Pulaski and Washington counties in the Meramec Region through grants from the Health Resources and Services Administration. The consortium has continued work in the community to help educate and inform the public of the effects of opioids and how/where to seek help. MRPC continued teaching the “Seeking Safety” curriculum to the Crawford, Dent, Maries and Pulaski 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 re-entering into the workforce once released, hosting four awareness walks in Belle, St. James, Steelville and Salem, and partnered with Prevention Consultants to provide the “Too Good For Drugs” program to reach 2,351 students in Crawford, Dent, Gasconade, Maries, Phelps and Washington counties. The consortium was able to purchase \$40,500 worth of Narcan for the local health departments to distribute in their respective communities.

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 three counties and two cities. Staff handles public awareness and outreach and processes floodplain permit requests in Crawford, Phelps and Maries counties and the cities of Meta and Salem.

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.

GIS Services: MRPC offers GIS services to local governments on a contractual basis.

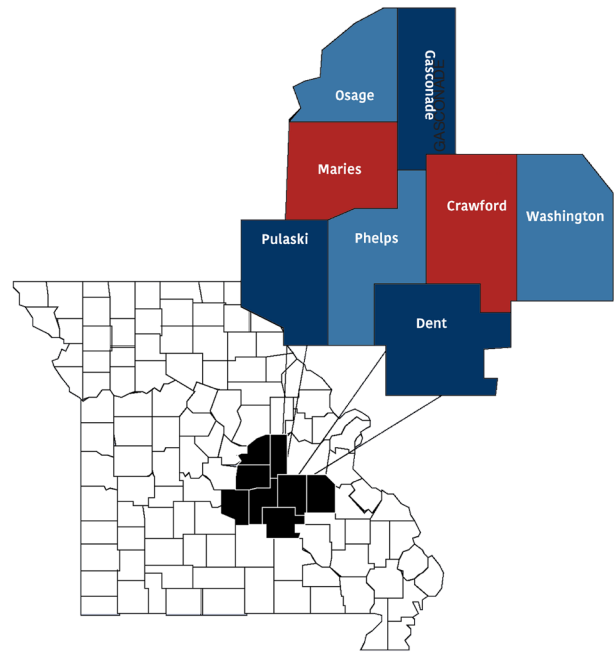
Meramec Region Facts

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 2021, the eight-county Meramec Region was home to 196,364 people, reflecting an increase of 280 people from the 2020 decennial census. Individual 2021 estimates county populations range from a low of 8,457 in Maries County to 53,460 in Pulaski County. Pulaski County saw a decrease of .92 percent in the 2021 ACS from the 2020 census. However, all counties in the region, except for Pulaski, showed an increase in population as reported in the 2021 ACS data compared to the 2020 census data. Comparing the 2020 census data to the 2021 ACS data, the state of Missouri is estimated to have decreased by only 2.1 percent.

The largest city in the region continues to



be Rolla, the county seat of Phelps County. It has 19,949 people by 2021 ACS estimates, down from 20,273 in 2020. The smallest city is Morrison in Gasconade County with 62 residents.

The region's population in 2021 showed slightly more males than females, just as it did in 2020. The region's median age in 2021 was 40.5 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 11.9 percent minority population according 2021 ACS data. This is down from 14.7 percent in 2020. 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 2021 ACS information,

Demographics 2021

Population.....	196,364
White	88.1%
Black.....	3.9%
Asian.....	1.6%
American Indian.....	0.6%
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific.....	0.2%
Some Other Race.....	.9%
Two or More Races	4.7%

Source: 2021 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis

was \$65,702. The state median income was \$77,976 while the U.S. median income was \$85,028.

The region’s median income is 84.3 percent of the state’s rate and only 77.3 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 2021 ACS data.

The region’s poverty rate also runs higher than the state and nation’s. Meramec residents living in poverty in 2021 numbered 20,815, which represents 10.6 percent of the population. This is a decrease from 2019’s 15.8 percent, but still higher than the state and national percentage, which both decreased in 2019. Some 8.5 percent of all Missouri residents live in poverty while 8.9 percent of all U.S. residents were living in poverty in 2021.

Median Household Incomes	
Meramec Region	\$65,702
Missouri	\$77,976
U.S.....	\$85,028
Region as % of State.....	84.3%
Region as % of Nation.....	77.3%

Source: 2021 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis

Household Income	
Households in the region.....	47,543
Under \$10,000.....	3.8%
\$10,000-14,999	2.6%
\$15,000-24,999	6.7%
\$25,000-34,999	9.6%
\$35,000 & over	77.4%

Source: 2021 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis

Persons in Poverty	
Meramec Region	10.6%
Missouri	8.5%
U.S.....	8.9%

Source: 2021 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis

Population by Age	
Under 5.....	6%
0-17	22%
18 & Over	78%
65+	18%
Median Age.....	40.5 years

Source: 2021 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis

Crawford County had the highest poverty rate in the region with 16.5 percent. The lowest was Osage County with 3.8 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. For the past few years, the region’s counties have experienced decreases in their unemployment rates. Despite COVID-19 layoffs, the average unemployment rate for the region from January to November 2022 was 2.88 percent, slightly higher than the state average at 2.85 percent, but lower than the 3.6 percent in 2021. The U.S. average for Jan.-Nov. 2022 was 3.68 percent. This is a good sign for the region as far as employment is concerned, especially during a pandemic.

Unemployment	
Employed	78,126
Unemployed	2,336
Total Labor Force.....	80,463
Region’s unemployment rate.....	2.88%
State’s unemployment rate.....	2.85%
U.S. unemployment rate.....	3.68%

*All data compiled by averaging Jan. to Nov. 2022 data.
Source: Missouri Department of Economic Development, MRPC

Housing
The Meramec Region has 86,977 total housing units with 72,087 occupied, according to the 2021 ACS data. The average number of individuals per unit in the region is 2.49 people, which is

slightly lower than the state average of 2.57 people according to the 2021 ACS number.

The number of occupied housing units in the region for 2021 was 72,087 which is decreasing as there were 73,273 in 2019 and 73,833 in 2020.

Of the 72,087 occupied units in 2021, 48,732 are owner occupied while 23,355 are renter occupied, according to the 2021 ACS five-year estimates. In 2021, the median value of a home in the region was \$140,738, compared to a state average of \$171,800. The average monthly rent for a home in the region in 2021 was \$683 while the state average was \$886. The majority of the housing stock — 77.7 percent — was built between 1960 and present, as indicated by the 2021 ACS five year estimates. These numbers remain the newest most accurate estimates at this time.

Education Levels

2021 percent of adults 25 years and older with at least a high school diploma.

Meramec Region	87.1%
Missouri	91%
U.S.....	88.9%

Source: 2021 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis

Education Levels

Some 87.1 percent of the region’s population aged 25 and older have at least a high school diploma, according to the 2021 ACS five-year estimates. This percentage is 3.9 percent less than the state and 1.8 percent less than the U.S. When compared to the 2020 percentage of 86 percent, the region improved in the percentage of adults 25 years and older who had at least a high school diploma by 1.1 percent.

The region’s most educated county in 2021 was Pulaski, with 94.4 percent of adults with high school diplomas or higher education level.

The Economy

Over the years, the region has diversified its

Housing at a Glance

Number of housing units in region..	86,997
Number occupied	72,087
Number owner occupied.....	48,732
Number renter occupied.....	23,355
Vacant units	14,510
Persons per unit in region	2.49
Persons per unit in state	2.57
Median value in region	\$140,738
Median value in state.....	\$171,800
Median monthly rent in region	\$683
Median monthly rent in state	\$886
Housing units in region	
built before 1939.....	7,058
Housing units in region	
built 1940-59.....	9,577
Housing units in region	
built 1960-1979.....	22,714
Housing units in region	
built 1980-99.....	24,973
Housing units in region	
built 2000 and after.....	19,936

Source: 2021 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis

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 over 34,000 employees, followed by manufacturing and retail trade.

Health care, education and social assistance are the highest employment sectors in the region with 19,550 employees, which makes up 24.6 percent of employment in the region, according to 2021 ACS five-year estimates.

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

The 2022 Missouri Directory of Manufacturers listed 451 manufacturing firms in the region, compared to 471 in 2021.

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. Quaker has facilities 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 offers daily commuter jet service and is the only airport 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.

Regional Industrial Employment

Employed persons 16 and over.....	79,574
Agriculture, forestry, fishing & hunting, & mining	2,212
Construction	6,031
Manufacturing.....	11,085
Transportation/warehousing & utilities	3,451
Wholesale trade.....	1,616
Retail trade	9,396
Information.....	854
Finance, insurance, real estate & rental/leasing	2,868
Professional, scientific, mgmt., admin. & waste mgmt. ser.	4,674
Educational, health & social ser.....	19,550
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation & food ser.....	7,311
Other services	3,246
Public Administration	7,316

Source: 2021 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis

Three 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, 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 in December 2021, the state of Missouri accepted the 144 miles of railbed, making it a part of the Missouri State Parks system. The development of a walking and biking trail is moving forward.

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

As of Jan. 23, 2023

CRAWFORD COUNTY

Rodney Neff, representing the Mayor of Cuba
Vacant, representing for-profit
Mary Heywood, representing the unemployed
Margie Brine, representing the mayor of Bourbon
Jason Ward, representing the mayor of Steelville
Steve Black, presiding commissioner

DENT COUNTY

Earl Brown, representing people with disabilities
Sally Burbridge, representing the mayor of Salem
Darrell Skiles, presiding commissioner
Robert Parsons, representing Farming/Agri Business
Gary Brown, representing for-profit

GASCONADE COUNTY

Tim Schulte, presiding commissioner
Kenny Sullinger, 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
Duane Kraettli, representing for-profit
Patricia Heaney, representing the mayor of Hermann
Tammy Bruckerhoff, representing tourism

MARIES COUNTY

T.C. James, mayor of Vienna
Ray Schwartze, representing for-profit
Vic Stratman, presiding commissioner
Steve Vogt, representing the mayor of Belle

OSAGE COUNTY

Rich Eisterhold, representing for-profit
Dr. Don Claycomb, representing education
Tammy Massman, mayor of Westphalia
Emily Sommerer, mayor of Meta
Darryl Griffin, presiding commissioner

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

PHELPS COUNTY

John Money, representing healthcare
Terry Austin, mayor of Edgar Springs
Jake Harlan, representing for-profit
James Poucher, mayor of Newburg
Tom Coots, representing the mayor of Rolla
John Meusch, representing lending institutions
Doug Smith, mayor of Doolittle
Shane Anselm, representing labor
Joey Auxier, presiding commissioner
Janet Walker, representing minorities
Jim Fleming, representing the mayor of St. James

PULASKI COUNTY

Brenda Doyle, representing seniors
Michael Dunbar, representing for-profit
Mike Null, mayor of Dixon
Jerry Brown, mayor of Waynesville
Glen Smith, mayor of Crocker
Gene Newkirk, presiding commissioner
George Lauritson, mayor of St. Robert

WASHINGTON COUNTY

T.R. Dudley, representing for-profit
John Casey, representing transportation
Mary Pat West, representing the mayor of Potosi
Rebecca Wilshire, chairperson of Mineral Point
William Hall, mayor of Irondale
John Robinson III, chairman of Caledonia
Dave Sansegraw, presiding commissioner
Laurel Boisonault, representing small business

2023 MRPC Leadership

Board & Staff

Chairman:Steve Vogt, Representing the City of Belle
Vice Chairman:.....Mary Heywood, At-Large Unemployed
Secretary:Darryl Griffin, Osage County Presiding Commissioner
Treasurer:Joey Auxier, Phelps County Presiding Commissioner
Executive Director:Bonnie J. Prigge
Assistant Director:Tammy Snodgrass
Fiscal Officer:Linda Loughridge
Environmental Programs Manager:Tammy Snodgrass
Project Development Manager:Kelly Sink
Housing Programs Manager:Donald Keeney
Planning Manager:Anne Freand
Marketing and Communications Manager:Caitlin Jones

2023 Associate Members

PLATINUM MEMBERS

Archer-Elgin
First Community National Bank
Phelps County Bank
Legends Bank
Pulaski County Sewer District #1

GOLD MEMBERS

None

SILVER MEMBERS

Argyle Catering

EXCHANGE MEMBERS

Owensville Area Chamber of Commerce
Salem Area Chamber of Commerce
Vienna Area Chamber of Commerce
Washington County Chamber of Commerce
Waynesville - St. Robert Chamber of Commerce
Dixon Area Chamber of Commerce
Steelville Chamber of Commerce

2023

**State Priorities
in the Meramec Region**



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

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT

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