

2024



MRPC

State Priorities in the Meramec Region

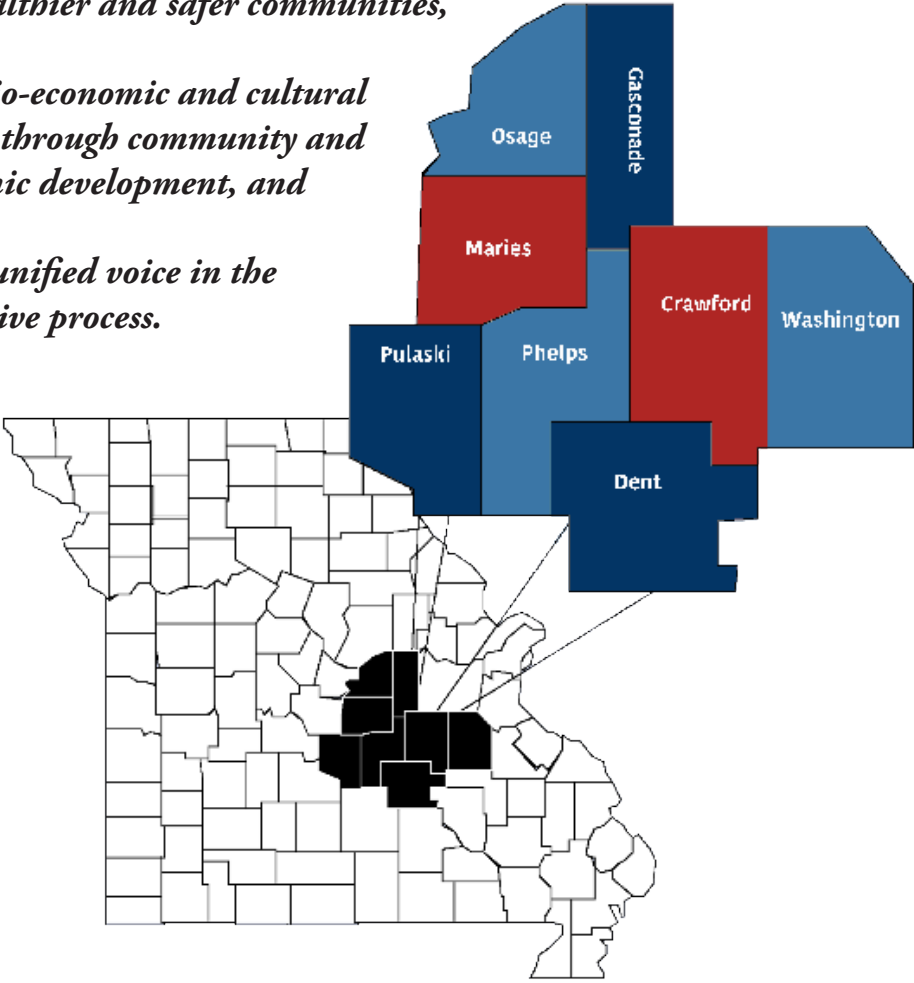
An Issues Report For the Region's Legislative Delegation

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

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.

2024 STATE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES IN THE MERAMEC REGION

As the 2024 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 road, bridge and multi-modal transportation in the Meramec Region as identified by MRPC and its TAC through the transportation planning framework. Top priorities are the four-laning of Highways 63 and 50.
2. Expand transportation and transit available to low-income citizens and senior citizens to ensure access to their health care providers.
3. Provide increased funding and more locally equitable match component for the transportation cost-share program, perhaps allowing for an in-kind match component with less match required for cost-share programs in rural areas.

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

1. Defer to federal wage rates (Davis-Bacon) instead of applying state prevailing wage in addition to federal rates, when both state and federal funds are being used on a construction project.
2. 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.
3. Support legislation that would raise the cap on state aid to RPCs to \$50,000 per year, subject to state appropriation. (HB1986, HB2069, SB939, SB1112)
4. Fully support Fort Leonard Wood and recognize that it is an economic development engine for Missouri.

ENVIRONMENTAL:

1. Reauthorize the legislation that authorizes the collection of fees from facilities that store hazardous materials set to sunset in 2024. These funds support the planning and training activities of the Missouri Emergency Response Commission (MERC) and the local emergency planning committees and districts throughout the state. This law must be reauthorized to avoid a suspension of these critical services that protect the state's residents and emergency responders. HB1870 puts forth a one-word change to extend the collection for six years starting in 2024.
2. Support the extension of the scrap tire fee which is set to expire in 2025. (Also consider having the fee additionally apply to used tires sold through retail shops).
3. Support recycling and reduce trash costs for those who do – incentivize. 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.

HEALTH CARE/SOCIAL SERVICE:

1. Assure adequate funding for rural hospitals and realize their importance not only to regional healthcare but also to local economies.
2. 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.
3. Increase incentives for doctors and health providers to serve in smaller communities.

EDUCATION:

1. Reinstate shop-building trades, family and consumer education and physical education in secondary education.
2. Ensure that more funds from the gambling industry go toward education and school support.
3. Provide adequate funding for rural school districts, especially those in impoverished areas. State should pay the same amount per student statewide.
4. Support post-secondary education in trades, i.e. technical schools and community colleges, as well as vocational and job training programs.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (CITY/COUNTY):

1. Oppose any legislation that would erode the taxing authority of cities and counties or remove existing taxing revenue from local governments.
2. 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.
3. Eliminate unfunded mandates.
4. Maintain absentee balloting, but eliminate the mail-in ballot process.

GENERAL:

1. Support the development of legislation that streamlines permitting, promotes cost effective regulatory policies and encourages utilizing the Nuclear Engineering programs in the University of Missouri system and other opportunities to develop recommendations for locating new generating facilities and forward-looking improvements to the energy grid.
2. 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.
3. Reinstate jail time for people who steal road signs. Perpetrators are no longer given jail time but only a fine. The fine does not cover the cost of signs.
4. Support adoption and ways to streamline and expedite the adoption process and reduce financial costs to adopting families.

Highlights of 2023 Accomplishments

MRPC's Impact

The Meramec Regional Planning Commission had a strong year in 2022-23. 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 following 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 2022-23. 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. Y and Holtsman Road in Pulaski 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 five transportation-related projects - Newburg (street reconstruction), Washington County/Mineral Point (bridge replacement), Irondale (street reconstruction), Potosi (bridge replacement) and Meta (culvert/drainage improvements). MRPC secured grants totaling \$1,790,287 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:

- Missouri Department of Transportation's (MoDOT) Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) for the city of Owensville to construct a section of the Rock Island Trail State Park (Funded);
- Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation's Defense Community Infrastructure Pilot Program for the city of Waynesville to construct a new fire station in Waynesville to serve the community and

- improve mutual aid to Fort Leonard Wood (Not Funded);
- Hello Alice's Antares REACH program for Salon Legacy/Legacy Beauty Institute to purchase property for a proposed cosmetology school (Not Funded);
- MoDOT's Bridge Replacement Offsystem (BRO) program for Phelps County to replace the bridge on CR 2110 over a branch of Spring Creek (Not Funded);
- MoDOT's BRO program for Phelps County to replace the bridge on CR 8410 over Spring Creek (Not Funded);
- MoDOT's BRO program for Phelps County to replace a bridge on CR 3620 over a branch of Dry Fork Creek (Funded);
- Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration's (PHMSA) Natural Gas Distribution Infrastructure Safety and Modernization Grant for the city of Hermann to replace 800 feet of storewater culvert pipe (Pending);
- PHMSA's Natural Gas Distribution Infrastructure Safety and Modernization Grant for the city of Potosi to upgrade 6,000 feet of pipeline to increase capacity and avoid potential damage to the pipe (Pending);
- Walmart Foundation's Community Grant Program for Meramec Community Enhancement Corporation (MCEC) to purchase gift card incentives for applicants on the HUD Lead Paint Hazard Program (Pending);
- Clif Family Foundation's Operational Support Program for MCEC to continue the Naturally Meramec marketing and promotion activities and food hub development (Not Funded);
- Missouri Foundation for Health's (MFFH) Opportunity Fund for MCEC to create Meramec Region Trauma Informed Communities and Harm Reduction (Pending);
- Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Grant Program for Washington County to replace the culvert on Lick Skillet Road at Rogue Creek (Pending);
- MoDOT's Governor's Cost Share Program for the city of Owensville to relocate the intersection of Industrial Drive and Springfield Road and realign Springfield Road (Funded);
- SEMA/FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program for the city of Potosi to replace the existing siren system (Funded);
- Community Foundation of the Ozarks's Diversion and Equity Grant for Life House Youth Center to increase funding for staff salaries in an effort to increase the number of children served and quality of the programs (Pending);
- Fidelity's Charitable Giving for the Vichy Farmers Market to help support weekly building rental fees and marketing and promotion of the newly created farmers market (Pending);
- Coover Foundations's Public Spaces Grant for the city of Dixon to resurface the park's walking trail (Not Funded);
- Coover Foundation's Public Spaces Grant for Washington County to plant trees and shrubs at Towne Square Park in Potosi (Pending);
- Missouri Department of Natural Resources's (MDNR) Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) for the city of Rolla to improve Ber Juan Park including Wilson Field and soccer field one upgrades (Pending);
- Dreyfus Foundation for the Life House Youth Center to increase funding for staff in an effort to increase the number of children served and quality of the programs (Pending);
- MDNR's LWCF program for the city of Hermann to rehabilitate Hermann ballfield (Pending);

- MDNR’s LWCF program for the city of Meta to establish a walking trail, parking, multi-sport court, benches and tables at the new Meta Elementary Memorial Park (Not Funded);
- MDNR’s LWCF program for the city of Potosi to grade fields two and three in the Potosi City Park and replace infield surfacing (Pending);
- MDNR’s LWCF program for the city of St. James to replace netting in the outfields of Courtney Field and West Field to help protect nearby homes (Pending);
- Missouri Department of Economic Development’s (MoDED) ARPA Community Revitalization program for the city of Salem to upgrade sidewalks, crosswalks and lighting in downtown along 4th street (Not Funded);
- MoDED’s ARPA Community Revitalization program for the city of Steelville to make repairs, improvements and ADA renovations to an existing city-owned building for a community center (Not Funded);
- MoDED’s ARPA Community Revitalization program for the city of Rolla to make improvements to the parks system including ballfield upgrades, ADA restrooms, exercise equipment and an ADA compliant trail (Funded);
- MoDED’s ARPA Local Tourism Asset Development Program for the Dierberg Educational Foundation for a proposed Hermann River Bluff Development to create a new distillery campus on unused property in the industrial park and generate additional tourism to the region (Funded);
- Missouri Department of Public Safety’s FY2023 ARPA Peace Officer Grant for the St. Robert Police Department to purchase an additional police cruiser (Pending);
- Missouri Department of Public Safety’s FY2023 ARPA Fire Protection Grant for St. Robert Fire and Rescue to purchase new turnout gear and replace worn and outdated gear (Funded);
- Missouri Department of Public Safety’s ARPA County Jail Maintenance and Improvements Grant for Phelps County Sheriff’s Department to renovate existing portions of the jail to accommodate additional staff and upgrade security functions (Not Funded);
- MoDED’s Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) General Infrastructure program for the city of Meta to improve storm drainage throughout town (Funded);
- MoDED’s CDBG Community Facility program for the city of Irondale to renovate the existing community building (Funded);
- MoDED’s CDBG General Infrastructure program for the city of Potosi to replace the Breton Creek Bridge on South Mine Street (Funded);
- MoDED’s CDBG Community Facility program for Phelps County to partner with Phelps Connections for Seniors and renovate an existing structure for a full-service senior center (Funded);
- Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) Affordable Connectivity Outreach Grant Program for MRPC to promote and increase ACP enrollment in the region (Funded);
- MoDOT’s TAP program for Gasconade County to develop the Rock Island Trail State Park from Owensville east city limits to Soap Creek Bridge (Funded);
- Missouri State Parks Recreational Trails Program (RTP) for the city of Rolla to complete phase one of a bicycle skills park (Not Funded);
- Missouri State Parks RTP for the city of Dixon to rehabilitate the existing walking/biking trail located in the Lion’s Club Park (Not Funded);
- Missouri State Parks RTP for the city of Meta to develop the Meta Elementary Memorial Trail (Not Funded);

8 2024 State Priorities in the Meramec Region

- MoDOT’s Highway Safety Program for MRPC to provide docudrama planning assistance statewide (Funded);
- MoDOT’s Highway Safety Program for MRPC for bicycle and pedestrian safety education in schools (Funded);
- MoDED’s ARPA Digital Demonstration Projects for MCEC to conduct outreach and increase ACP enrollment (Funded);
- Hart Family Foundation Fund for Small Towns for Pulaski County Historical Society and Museum to purchase a new computer system for the museum (Pending);
- United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Farmers Market Promotion Program for Vichy Farmers Market to expand the newly-formed farmers market (Pending);
- Delta Regional Authority’s (DRA) Local Development District Pilot Program 2023 for MRPC to allow staff to increase project development and grant writing efforts in the MRPC’s DRA counties (Funded);
- US Department of Justice’s Cops Hiring Program (CHP) for the Gasconade County Sheriff to hire two officers to focus on drug activity in the county and community policing (Not Funded);
- US Department of Justice’s CHP for the Dixon Police Department to hire one officer to assist with addressing an increase in drug related crimes (Funded);
- Impact100 Crawford County Annual Grant for Life House Youth Center to increase project spaces in the current Cuba facility (Pending);
- MoDED’s ARPA Non-Profit Grant for Meramec Regional Development Corporation to cover operation funds and staff time to market and package SBA loans (Not Funded);
- MoDOT’s Missouri Regional Bridge Program for Gasconade County to replace Ruskaup Bridge (Not Funded);
- MoDOT’s Missouri Regional Bridge Program for Gasconade County to replace Rohlfling Bridge (Funded);
- DRA’s State’s Economic Development Assistance Program for the city of Irondale to upgrade primary streets in town and provide access to businesses and organizations serving the community (Funded);
- MoDOT’s Missouri Regional Bridge Program for Maries County to replace CR 519 Bridge (Not Funded);
- MoDOT’s Missouri Regional Bridge Program for Maries County to replace CR 405 Bridge (Not Funded);
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Opioid Affected Youth Initiative for MCEC to implement multiple evidence-based programs in schools and jails to reduce recidivism, address outstanding challenges, encourage youth participation and encourage healthy family units (Not Funded);
- Federal Highway Administration Charging and Fueling Infrastructure Program for the city of St. Robert to install electric vehicle charging stations at the St. Robert Municipal Center (Pending); and
- MoDED’s ARPA Non-Profit Grant Program for Life House Center to supplement lost funds caused by COVID-19 pandemic (Pending).

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 Compre-

hensive 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.

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 203 grants, totaling \$3.69 million, to support local and region-

al projects. These grants have targeted businesses, local governments, schools and non-profits. The 2023 grant cycle provided funding for an anerobic digestion of slaughterhouse waste, provided staff salary and equipment maintenance for a community-based recycling center, for a improvements to a recycling 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 6.08 tons from more than 530 residents at an estimated cost of \$15,548.67 during 2023. Recently 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. SB 936, sponsored by Senator Mike Bernskoetter, 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 245 tons (25,000 tires) of illegally dumped tires collected by county road crews. The cost to date is \$53,028.

Through the Ozark Rivers Solid Waste Management District's grant program, MRPC has organized 72 special waste collections since April 2003. These subsidized collections have recycled 704.64 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 194 dump sites have been cleaned up, partnerships have been built and the region-wide survey has been updated. In doing so, an estimated 991 tons of trash has been removed and properly disposed; and 20,235 tires have been collected for recycling. The district has recruited 1,888 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), which is responsible for updating and distributing the region's (excluding Pulaski County) hazardous materials response plan; maintaining records of reportable quantities of hazardous materials located in the region; and making residents aware of their rights under Community Right-to-Know law. In 2022-23, the district formally organized as its own entity, at the request of the Missouri Emergency Response Commission. 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 FY23 \$101,105.25 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.

Hazard Mitigation Planning

In 2023, MRPC began working to complete one and update another county Hazard Mitigation Plans (HMP), using grant funds through the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) and matching county funds. Dent County's plan was approved in March 2023. Staff began work on the Maries county plan at the start of the year in 2023 and will be finalizing the plan in the coming months. 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 FY2022-23, MRPC assisted, on average, 696 families each month by providing over \$2.9 million in rental assistance for the year. PHA staff also performed 1,163 tenant inspec-

tions.

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, 29 families have escrow accounts, totaling a combined \$62,167.90. In FY 2022-23, seven clients successfully completed their FSS contracts and received their escrow accounts, which had a combined total of \$42,570.51.

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 Delta Regional Authority (DRA) for the four-county area of Crawford, Dent, Phelps and Washington counties. 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. In 2022-23, MRPC hosted the "Taste Of Washington County" event where local food producers were highlighted. Additionally, the consortium coordinated free food safety education opportunities, attended local meetings and events, and established new regional Day Trips 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 Juve-

nile 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. Continuation of the implementation of the Meramec Region Rural Opioid Initiatives — two consortiums funded by the Department of Justice’s Opioid Affected Youth Initiative (OAYI) and the Health Resources and Service Administration — saw a variety of work to combat the growing problem of opioid use disorder through education, awareness and prevention strategies within MRPC’s eight-county region. The OAYI project was closed out in September 2023.

In fiscal year 2022-23, MRPC staff offered Seeking Safety classes inside Meramec Region jails, local high schools and the Phelps County Drug Court. Seeking Safety is an evidence-based curriculum, that helps clients be safe from trauma, including, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Substance Use Disorder, by emphasizing coping skills, grounding techniques and education. As of August 2023, 628 individuals have graduated through the Seeking Safety program.

The scope of the work across the opioid initiatives includes consortium meetings, a presence in the jails and 25th judicial system, a presence in schools, assistance to employers through an employer focused workshop, awareness activities and remembrance events, the purchase of Narcan for health departments and providing drug-take back boxes in the region.

This year, the Opioid Affected Youth Initiative brought together a consortium of at-risk youth to complete a SWOT analysis. The students were able to talk about their perception of the problems facing kids in the schools throughout our region and also potential solutions they deemed beneficial.

After the SWOT analysis, MRPC created a one-page informational flier and the youth consortium took that information along with their concerns and ideas to meetings with state legislators during Recovery Day in March 2023 at the Capitol in Jefferson City. Recovery Day provided the youth participating with the opportunity to allow their voice to be heard by those setting state policy.

MRPC has subcontracted with Prevention Consultants of Missouri to deliver a “Too Good For Drugs” program in the schools to 3,268 students and with Dr. Sean Siebert, Invent Yourself, LLC., to deliver Rehabilitation Through Innovation program in the jails to 189 residents.

The Opioid Affected Youth Initiative also put together backpacks for low-income students through the area head starts. The backpacks included essential items such as blankets, gloves, hats, hairbrushes, toiletries, underwear, socks and more. Some 633 backpacks were distributed in FY 22-23.

Services to Local Governments

Ordinance Codification: Since 1975, MRPC has provided ordinance codification services to cities — including 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, private citizens 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.

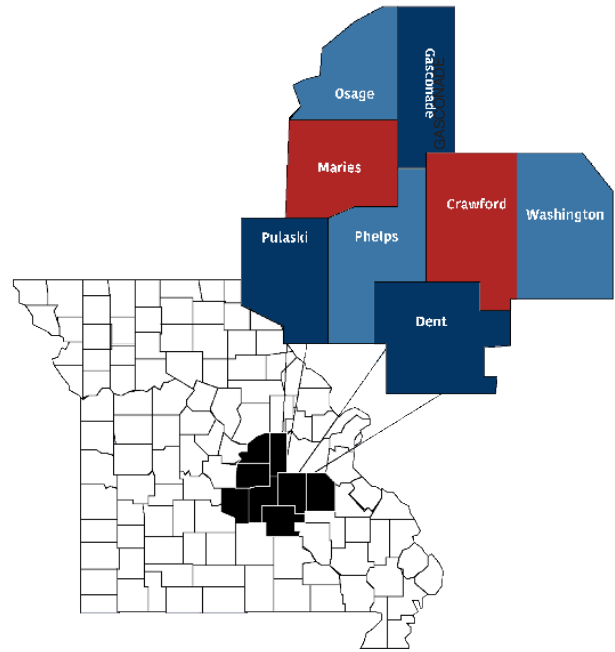
Meramec Region Facts

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 2022, the eight-county Meramec Region was home to 196,310 people, reflecting an increase of 226 people from the 2020 decennial census. Individual 2022 estimates county populations range from a low of 8,454 in Maries County to 53,726 in Pulaski County. Crawford and Pulaski counties saw a decrease in the 2022 ACS from the 2020 census. However, all other counties in the region, showed an increase in population as reported in the 2022 ACS data compared to the 2020 census data. Comparing the 2020 census data to the 2022 ACS data, the state of Missouri is estimated to have decreased by less than .01% percent.

The largest city in the region continues to be Rolla, the county seat of Phelps County. It has



19,943 people by 2022 ACS estimates, down from 20,273 in 2020. The smallest city is Morrison in Gasconade County with 93 residents.

The region's population in 2022 showed slightly more males than females, just as it did in 2020. The region's median age in 2022 was 40.3 years, which is slightly older than the median age in the state and nation. The median age in the region decreased by .2 from 2021 to 2022 ACS data.

The region is predominantly white with a 8.79 percent minority population according 2022 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 2022 ACS information, was \$71,249. The state median income was \$83,420

Demographics 2022

Population.....	196,310
White	91.21%
Black.....	2.05%
Asian.....	0.95%
American Indian.....	0.43%
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific.....	0.16%
Some Other Race.....	0.56%
Two or More Races	4.64%

Source: 2022 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis

while the U.S. median income was \$92,148.

The region’s median income is 85.4 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 2022 ACS data.

The region’s poverty rate also runs higher than the state and nation’s. Meramec residents living in poverty in 2022 numbered 27,822, which represents 14.2 percent of the population. This is an increase from 2021’s 10.6 percent, and higher than the state’s 13.2 percent and the national’s 12.6 percent. Washington County had the highest poverty rate in the region with 17.74 percent. The lowest was Osage County with .01 percent.

The region, for several decades, has been plagued with high unemployment rates. Washing-

Population by Age	
Under 5.....	5.8%
0-17	21.9%
18 & Over	78.1%
65+	16.2%
Median Age.....	40.3 years
Source: 2022 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis	

ton 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 2023 was 3.1 percent, slightly higher than the state average at 2.74 percent, but higher than the 2.88 percent in 2022. The U.S. average for Jan.-Nov. 2023 was 3.63 percent.

Median Household Incomes	
Meramec Region	\$71,249
Missouri	\$83,420
U.S.....	\$92,148
Region as % of State.....	85.4%
Region as % of Nation.....	77.3%
Source: 2022 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis	
Household Income	
Households in the region.....	47,371
Under \$10,000.....	3.2%
\$10,000-14,999	2.5%
\$15,000-24,999	4.9%
\$25,000-34,999	8.7%
\$35,000 & over	80.7%
Source: 2022 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis	
Persons in Poverty	
Meramec Region	14.2%
Missouri	13.2%
U.S.....	12.6%
Source: 2022 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis	

Unemployment	
Employed	78,337
Unemployed	2,537
Total Labor Force.....	80,874
Region’s unemployment rate.....	3.1%
State’s unemployment rate.....	2.74%
U.S. unemployment rate.....	3.63%
*All data compiled by averaging Jan. to Nov. 2023 data. Source: Missouri Department of Economic Development, MRPC	

Housing

The Meramec Region has 86,951 total housing units with 73,317 occupied, according to the 2022 ACS data. The average number of individuals per unit in the region is 2.42 people, which is slightly higher than the state average of 2.3 people according to the 2022 ACS number.

The number of occupied housing units in the region for 2022 was 73,317, which is increasing from the 72,087 2021 and but still down from the 73,833 in 2020.

Of the 73,317 occupied units in 2022,

49,711 are owner occupied while 22,606 are renter occupied, according to the 2022 ACS five-year estimates. In 2022, the median value of a home in the region was \$160,387.50, compared to a state average of \$221,200. The average monthly rent for a home in the region in 2022 was \$720 while the state average was \$954. The majority of the housing stock — 80.5 percent — was built between 1960 and present, as indicated by the 2022 ACS five-year estimates. These numbers remain the newest most accurate estimates at this time.

Education Levels

Some 89.2 percent of the region’s population aged 25 and older have at least a high school diploma, according to the 2022 ACS five-year estimates. This percentage is 2.4 percent less than the state

Education Levels	
2022 percent of adults 25 years and older with at least a high school diploma.	
Meramec Region	89.2%
Missouri	91.6%
U.S.....	89.6%
Source: 2022 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis	

and .4 percent less than the U.S. When compared to the 2021 percentage of 87.1 percent, the region improved in the percentage of adults 25 years and older who had at least a high school diploma by 2.1 percent.

The region’s most educated county in 2021 was Pulaski, with 94.5 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 over 34,500 employees, followed by manufacturing and retail trade.

Housing at a Glance	
Number of housing units in region..	86,951
Number occupied	73,317
Number owner occupied.....	49,711
Number renter occupied.....	22,606
Vacant units	14,634
Persons per unit in region	2.42
Persons per unit in state	2.3
Median value in region	\$160,387
Median value in state.....	\$221,200
Median monthly rent in region	\$720
Median monthly rent in state	\$954
Housing units in region	
built before 1939.....	7,257
Housing units in region	
built 1940-59.....	9,688
Housing units in region	
built 1960-1979.....	22,888
Housing units in region	
built 1980-99.....	24,955
Housing units in region	
built 2000 and after.....	22,149
Source: 2022 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis	

Health care, education and social assistance are the highest employment sectors in the region with 19,158 employees, which makes up 24.1 percent of employment in the region, according to 2022 ACS five-year estimates.

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

The 2023 Missouri Directory of Manufacturers listed 457 manufacturing firms in the region, compared to 451 in 2022.

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.

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

Regional Industrial Employment

Employed persons 16 and over.....	79,555
Agriculture, forestry, fishing & hunting, & mining	2,375
Construction	6,409
Manufacturing.....	10,461
Transportation/warehousing & utilities	3,797
Wholesale trade.....	1,447
Retail trade	9,710
Information.....	867
Finance, insurance, real estate & rental/leasing	2,757
Professional, scientific, mgmt., admin. & waste mgmt. ser.	4,686
Educational, health & social ser.....	19,158
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation & food ser.....	7,210
Other services	3,454
Public Administration	7,224

Source: 2022 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis

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 the Rock Island Trail State Park as 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. 9, 2024

CRAWFORD COUNTY

Rodney Neff, representing the Mayor of Cuba
Erik Lowes, 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
Kyle Williams, representing the mayor of Salem
Gary Larson, presiding commissioner
Robert Parsons, representing farming/agri business
John Smith, representing for-profit

GASCONADE COUNTY

Tim Schulte, presiding commissioner
Merilee Spurgeon, 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 Kraetli, representing for-profit
Patricia Heaney, representing the mayor of Hermann
Tammy Bruckerhoff, representing tourism

MARIES COUNTY

Timothy Schell, 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
Scott Knoll, chairman of Freeburg
Jan Haviland, representing industry
Dwight Massey, mayor of Linn
Ryan Davis, chairman of Argyle
Marie Slusser, mayor of Chamois

PHELPS COUNTY

John Money, representing healthcare
Albert Hamlet, mayor of Edgar Springs
Kent Bagnall, representing for-profit
Patti Chism, mayor of Newburg
Tom Coots, representing the mayor of Rolla
Adam Housewright, representing lending institutions
Doug Smith, mayor of Doolittle
Shane Anselm, representing labor
Joey Auxier, presiding commissioner
Dan Knoell, representing the mayor of St. James

PULASKI COUNTY

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

WASHINGTON COUNTY

T.R. Dudley, representing for-profit
John Casey, representing transportation
Joseph Blount, mayor of Potosi
Nick Courtois, chairperson of Mineral Point
William Hall, mayor of Irondale
John Robinson III, chairman of Caledonia
Dave Sansegraw, presiding commissioner
Vacant, representing small business

State senators and representatives serving the region are ex-officio, non-voting members of the board.

2024 MRPC Leadership

Board & Staff

Chairman:Mary Heywood, Representing the Unemployed
Vice Chairman:.....Darryl Griffin, Osage County Presiding Commissioner
Secretary:Joey Auxier, Phelps County Presiding Commissioner
Treasurer:Sean Wilson, Waynesville Mayor
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

2024 Associate Members

PLATINUM MEMBERS

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

GOLD MEMBERS

None

SILVER MEMBERS

Argyle Catering
Investment Realty
Gascosage Electric Cooperative

EXCHANGE MEMBERS

Owensville Area Chamber of Commerce
Salem Area Chamber of Commerce
Washington County Chamber of Commerce
Dixon Area Chamber of Commerce
Steelville Chamber of Commerce
Hermann Area Chamber of Commerce

2024

**State Priorities
in the Meramec Region**



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

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT

**Meramec Regional Planning Commission
4 Industrial Drive, St. James, MO 65559
Phone: (573)265-2993 • Fax: (573)265-3550
Email: info@meramecregion.org**

Or visit:

**www.meramecregion.org
[Facebook.com/meramecregion](https://www.facebook.com/meramecregion)**