

Meramec Regional Planning Commission
Minutes
January 9, 2025

Call to Order

Chairman Mary Heywood called the Jan. 9, 2025, meeting of the Meramec Regional Planning Commission to order at 7:30 p.m. The meeting was conducted via Zoom only, due to weather concerns.

Welcome

Chairman Heywood welcomed everyone to the meeting. Board members participating were Dawn Bell, John Casey, T.R. Dudley, Taisia Gordon, Darryl Griffin, Patricia Heaney, Mary Heywood, Duane Kraettli, Gary Larson, Anita Ivey, John Money, Tim Schulte, Vic Stratman, Jason Ward, Steve Smyth and Sean Wilson. MRPC staff members participating via Zoom were Bonnie Prigge, Tammy Snodgrass, Linda Loughridge, Caitlin Jones, Anne Freand and Donald Keeney. Guests participating via Zoom were Ken Schultz, CPA - Schultz, Wood and Rapp, Rep. John Hewkin, Grant Wilson with Rep. Jason Smith's office and Sarah Williams with Rep. Bob Onder's office.

Consent Agenda

The following consent agenda items were presented for approval:

a. Minutes – Dec. 12, 2024

b. Local Review
None.

c. State Review
None.

The Office of Administration issues the Missouri Federal Assistance Clearinghouse grant reviews weekly. Staff is sharing reports in between meetings with board members. If you have questions about grants listed, you can call MRPC staff, or the Office of Administration as listed on the reports.

d. Contracts

• Phelps Connections for Seniors

Permission is requested for executive director/board chair to enter into a contract with Phelps Connection for Seniors for technical assistance/grant writing services, and to sign all necessary documents.

• Maries County

Permission is requested for MRPC's chairman and/or executive director to approve and sign a Maries County Floodplain technical assistance contract for the period Jan. 1, 2025, to Dec. 31, 2025, and for MRPC's chairman and/or executive director to sign any necessary documents.

• Crawford County

Permission is requested for MRPC's chairman and/or executive director to approve and sign a Crawford County Floodplain technical assistance contract for the period Jan. 1, 2025, to Dec. 31, 2025, and for MRPC's chairman and/or executive director to sign any necessary documents.

Commissioner Jason Ward made a motion to approve the consent agenda with noted additions; Presiding Commissioner Darryl Griffin seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Presentation of Audit– Ken Schultz, CPA – Schultz, Wood and Rapp, CPA

Mr. Schultz presented the audit report for fiscal years ended June 30, 2024 and 2023. The financial statements received a "clean opinion," meaning they were accurately presented following Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), using accrual accounting. He said the report, which spans 26 pages, includes a Management Discussion and Analysis (MD&A), comparing fiscal years 2024 and 2023, with insights from management.

He pointed out that the balance sheets for MRPC and its three component units (MRB, RLF, IRP) showed stable assets with a slight decrease in fund balances from 2023 to 2024. The total assets were slightly up in 2024, and the fund balance was down from 2023.

Mr. Schultz said there was a drop in revenues and profitability for MRPC, especially in business-type activities. Operating income also dropped in 2024 and 2023, with the bigger impact occurring in 2024. Pandemic impact was identified as a potential reason for the decreased revenues, especially in planning and project development.

He mentioned that in federal expenditures, total federal awards in 2024 were up from 2023. Key sources included the U.S. Departments of Commerce, Defense, Justice and Transportation, along with other federal agencies.

Mr. Schultz said a single audit was performed due to expenditures exceeding \$750,000, which will increase to \$1 million in the future. He noted that the audit process was smooth, and the team found everything in good shape.

He concluded his report by acknowledging Linda Loughridge's efforts in coordinating the audit process effectively and expressed appreciation for the teamwork involved.

Bonnie Prigge, MRPC, thanked Mr. Schultz for his clear explanation and noted that the pandemic's lingering effects likely contributed to the financial challenges.

Presiding Commissioner Darryl Griffin made a motion to approve the audit as presented; Commissioner Jason Ward seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Introduction of New Legislator: Mary Heywood, Chairman

Congressman John Hewkin, a newly elected legislator and former county commissioner, introduced himself to the group. He acknowledged that it had been a while since he was involved with MRPC but mentioned his previous experience attending MRPC meetings as a county commissioner.

Ms. Prigge welcomed the Rep. Hewkin and encouraged him to share any updates about the ongoing legislative session.

Rep. Hewkin provided an update on the legislative session, noting that it was the first week, with the governor's inauguration scheduled for Monday. He mentioned that Rep. John Patterson was chosen as Speaker of the House. Rep. Hewkin expressed excitement about the incoming group of freshmen legislators, many of whom have small business expertise and diverse backgrounds. He believes this will help make the legislative body stronger in the coming year. He expressed optimism for this year's legislative session, mentioning that there seems to be more cooperation in both the House and Senate. He believes that, despite a tight budget, this year could be more productive than last.

Presentation: Idea Exchange with State Legislators: Mary Heywood, Chairman and Bonnie Prigge, MRPC Executive Director

Bonnie shared that board members would like to bring some of the Meramec Region's top priorities to the attention of the legislators. A full copy of the priorities would be provided to the legislators when a delegation from MRPC visits the Capitol later this month. She added that, each year, MRPC goes through a process of surveying board members to determine state priorities. These priorities are then voted on, and the top priorities are summarized in a report that will be presented to the region's legislators. Tonight, Bonnie said the board would like to share some of those top priorities.

Regional Transportation: Presiding Commissioner Darryl Griffin

The presiding commissioner spoke about the need to improve regional roads, particularly Highway 63 and Highway 50. He emphasized the importance of upgrading these roads to four lanes, especially given heavy traffic, dangerous curves and fatalities. The roads are also key for oversized equipment traffic. The presiding commissioner pointed out that with the work on I-70, more traffic would likely shift to these routes.

Ms. Prigge explained that transportation priorities are discussed in MRPC's transportation advisory and multimodal committees. These committees help set regional transportation priorities, which are shared with MoDOT for funding consideration.

Regional Economic Development: Presiding Commissioner Tim Schulte

The presiding commissioner addressed regional economic development priorities, specifically advocating for the creation of incentives to encourage housing development. He also mentioned policies promoting affordable housing, especially in rural areas.

Rep. Hewkin inquired about potential housing developments, specifically asking about a 300-home project in Cuba and a potential 500-home development in Rolla. Ms. Prigge confirmed that the Rolla project is in process, with homes being constructed in a way that maximizes space. She mentioned that the project is not aimed at entry-level housing but could create opportunities for current homeowners to move into the new construction homes, and first-time home buyers would purchase homes being vacated.

Housing and Public Comment: Bonnie Prigge, MRPC Executive Director

Ms. Prigge noted that the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program would be seeking public comment on its action plan, which includes funding for programs such as the Missouri Housing Trust Fund. She encouraged board members to participate in the comment process, especially if housing is an issue in their local areas.

Healthcare and Social Services: Commissioner John Money

Commissioner Money emphasized the need for adequate funding in healthcare and social services, specifically for mental health and substance abuse programs in rural areas. The group's priority is to ensure sufficient funding for behavioral health services, including crisis centers and treatment facilities.

Rep. Hewkin shared his personal experience from working in healthcare, where patients sometimes wait for weeks in emergency rooms due to a lack of available mental health placement. This highlights the severity of the mental health crisis and the need for more resources and services. He expressed hope to be placed on a healthcare committee to advocate for these issues.

Environmental Priorities: Commissioner Steve Vogt

Commissioner Vogt spoke about the need for funding to support environmental services. Specifically, he mentioned the lack of funding last year, which has left programs relying on dwindling reserves. He emphasized that this issue needs to be reauthorized and addressed quickly.

Ms. Prigge explained that the legislation to reauthorize the Missouri Emergency Response Commission and Local Emergency Planning Districts was delayed in the Senate last year. She mentioned that this year, Representative Tim Taylor has refiled the bill to reinstate the funding with a new sunset date. There is also a push to include local emergency planning districts in the appropriation discussions, ensuring they can continue their operations, she said.

Education Priorities: Commissioner Jason Ward

Commissioner Ward emphasized the need for adequate funding for rural school districts, particularly in low-income areas. He stressed that rural schools deserve the same funding per student as those in larger districts. The goal should be to ensure that rural schools have the same opportunities to attract quality teachers and provide excellent materials and equipment for students, he said.

Rep. Hewkin shared his experience from serving on a school board, expressing disbelief that school districts often have to pass budgets without knowing what funding will come from the state. He suggested that securing guaranteed transportation funding from the state could help schools build more reliable budgets.

Bonnie Prigge discussed the challenges schools face with underfunded transportation and concerns over the impact of school choice legislation, especially on rural schools. She noted that while school choice might not heavily affect rural areas, it remains a concern.

Local Government and Grants: Commissioner T.R. Dudley

Commissioner Dudley spoke about the challenges small and impoverished communities face when applying for grants due to the high match requirements (typically 20-50%). He shared an example of the village of Mineral Point, which was able to secure a grant for a failing sewer system with only a 1% match, thanks to the American Rescue Plan Act. However, he noted that many small communities struggle to meet the higher match requirements.

Rep. Hewkin suggested the possibility of creating a tiered-approach to match requirements, where smaller communities would pay lower percentages, making grants more accessible.

Commissioner Dudley expressed support for this and mentioned that such a tiered system could be included in the scoring criteria for grants.

Daycare Challenges: Commissioner Mary Heywood

Commissioner Heywood raised concerns about the lack of daycare options and the financial struggles of daycare facilities in rural areas. She noted that two daycare centers in Bourbon closed due to being unable to pay competitive wages to staff. There are incentives for families to pay for daycare, but there are insufficient incentives for individuals to open or sustain daycare centers, she said.

Rep. Hewkin acknowledged the issue and shared that it had been discussed among legislators. He also mentioned that some state agencies were behind in paying childcare providers, worsening the situation. While a solution hasn't been found yet, he assured that the legislature is aware of the problem and working on it.

Ms. Prigge provided a positive update, mentioning that Rolla Public Schools, in partnership with the Phelps County Community Foundation, purchased a building to expand its early childhood

program. She said this new facility will serve about 350 children, and they are working on fundraising efforts and seeking state support for the project.

Rep. Hewkin said he intends to speak with Sen. Justin Brown about the early childhood facility expansion in Rolla and work on finding solutions to the daycare crisis.

State Aid to Planning Commissions: Bonnie Prigge

Ms. Prigge shared a key issue regarding the funding for State Aid to Planning Commissions. Last year, Sen. Justin Brown and Sen. Rusty Black introduced a bill to increase the funding cap for regional planning commissions from \$25,000 to \$50,000, with an inflation escalator. The last time the funding cap was updated was in 1965, when the legislation was created.

Ms. Prigge said an increase in funding is especially critical for regional planning commissions, which use these funds for grant writing and to match Federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) grants. With the reauthorization of EDA at the Federal level, there's potential for an increase in planning grants, but local match dollars would also need to rise.

She said the bill was not passed last year but is being reintroduced in the current legislative session, with the hope that it will move forward.

Day at the Capitol: Bonnie Prigge

Ms. Prigge mentioned the Day at the Capitol on January 22 (moved from January 21 due to the holiday on January 20). The first meeting will be with Senators in Sen. Justin Brown's office at 10:30 a.m., followed by a lunch break. Then, from 12:00 to 2:00 p.m., the group will be in Rep. Bruce Sassman's office (Room 207) to meet with other legislators. She said the group will bring more information to legislators and provide a physical copy of their report.

Update from State and Federal Legislators:

Grant Wilson, Congressman Jason Smith's office

Mr. Wilson mentioned that the 119th Congress has started with some important bills being discussed, such as the Laken Riley Act, which deals with criminal charges for illegal aliens. Congressman Smith is also working on budget reconciliation and tax cuts.

Sarah Williams, Congressman Bob Onder's office:

Ms. Williams said the Congressman's staff are working on getting phones, emails and everything set up. She thanked everyone in advance for their patience. Ms. Williams said the Congressman and his staff are looking forward to working with the district.

Ms. Prigge thanked Ms. Williams for attending the meeting. She mentioned that she, along with MRPC's board chairman, Mary Heywood, and MRPC's planning manager, are scheduled to be in Washington, DC., in March for a legislative conference. Ms. Prigge said she will be reaching out to her to schedule a time to meet with the Congressman.

Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC): Anne Freand

No report was given.

External Relations Committee: Tim Schulte, vice chair

Presiding Commissioner Schulte reported on External Relations activities as follows:

The presiding commissioner reported that the “MRPC Day at the Capitol” has been moved to Jan. 22, with a backup date of Jan. 29.

The committee reviewed a tally sheet of federal priorities, including topics like transportation, economic development, the environment, health and social services. The presiding commissioner noted that health and social services will be a major topic in February. Ms. Prigge confirmed that Congressional delegation members and their liaisons will be invited to this discussion.

The state legislative priorities were briefly reviewed, and the group discussed adding a new priority to the list of state legislative priorities at the request of Mayor Sean Wilson. He proposed adding a focus on addressing the waitlist for mental health services and advocating for additional funding for the Department of Mental Health. It was noted that there are currently over 700 people on the waitlist due to insufficient funding.

Gary Larson made a motion to approve the addition of addressing the waitlist for mental health services and advocating for additional funding for the Department of Mental Health to the state priorities list. Steve Vogt seconded the motion. The motion carried.

The committee discussed adding two new items to the federal priorities:

- Supporting Fort Leonard Wood under the economic and community development section.
- Increasing funding for the HUD Housing Choice Voucher Program under the healthcare and social services section.

Commissioner Jason Ward made a motion to approve the federal priorities with the above noted additions. Commissioner John Casey seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Presiding Commissioner Schulte reported that the committee touched on the bylaws for the MRB. More detailed discussion will occur later.

Staff provided a handout on legislative updates.

Operations Committee: Jason Ward

Commissioner Ward reported on operations activities as follows:

The committee reviewed MRPC/MRB and MRPC/MRDC-RLF and IRP program financial statements for the period ended Dec. 31, 2024.

Commissioner Jason Ward made a motion to approve the financials for the period ending Dec. 31, 2024; Commissioner Sean Wilson seconded the motion. The motion carried.

The committee reviewed the FY2024-2025 revised budgets for MRPC/MRB and MRPC/MRDC RLF and IRP programs. The revised budget included the leases between MRPC and MRB.

Commissioner Jason Ward made a motion to approve the revised budget that includes the leases between MRPC and MRB; Darryl Griffin seconded the motion. The motion carried.

The committee conducted its annual review of the conflict of interest policy, and it was approved by the committee.

Commissioner Jason Ward made a motion to approve the conflict of interest policy. Commissioner Sean Wilson seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Planning Committee: T.R. Dudley, chair

Commissioner Dudley reported on planning activities as follows:

The committee reviewed the state and federal priorities and discussed the comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDS). He reported the committee is working on making the plan more actionable.

Housing Board: Commissioner Tim Schulte

Commissioner Schulte reported on housing activities as follows:

The board approved the financials for the period ending Dec. 31, 2024.

Commissioner Schulte reported the Public Housing Agency (PHA) received a clean audit for fiscal year 2023-2024, with no findings. The PHA is now considered a low-risk auditee.

It was reported that the PHA waitlist is currently closed. There are 655 families on the wait list with 90 voucher holders currently seeking housing. The list will reopen once funding stabilizes.

The housing board was informed that the PHA has been awarded the FSS (Family Self-Sufficiency) Renewal Grant.

Environmental: Tammy Snodgrass, Assistant Executive Director/Environmental Programs Manager

Ms. Snodgrass informed the board the theme for this year's Earth Day Trash Art and Poster Contest is "Put Waste in its Place." She also reported that a Paint Stewardship bill has been filed at the state level to develop a paint take-back program. The bill has been introduced for the past few years and is progressing further this time, she said.

She mentioned that the Region I HSOC meeting is scheduled for Jan. 30 at 1:00 p.m.

A handout of environmental activities was provided.

Business Loans: Linda Loughridge, Fiscal Officer

Ms. Loughridge discussed the ongoing decertification of MRDC (Meramec Regional Development Corporation) as a Certified Development Company (CDC). This process is contingent on closing the final loan approved by SBA. However, due to some delays, the necessary documents could not be submitted in time. She said she hopes to get the documents submitted soon to avoid further delays.

Ms. Loughridge also discussed staffing changes. Bobbie Bailey, a staff member working on this final loan, has resigned effective immediately. She had initially planned to resign on Nov. 30 but had stayed on to assist with the loan closure. Due to personal reasons, she decided to leave the position. Ms. Loughridge expressed support for Bobbie's decision and will now focus on finding new staff to market the RLF program and get the available funds distributed.

Meramec Community Enhancement Corporation (MCEC): Kelly Sink

No report was given.

Meramec Regional Community Foundation (MRCF): Bonnie Prigge

Ms. Prigge reported that the MRCF has two grants available, each worth \$750.

- One is focused on a community economic development project with a special emphasis on Route 66 projects.
- The other targets projects benefiting low-income families and at-risk children.
- The application deadline is January 24, and the Grant Review Committee will meet on February 11 to review applications.
- Applications can be accessed through the Community Foundation of the Ozarks website.

Ms. Prigge mentioned it was scholarship season.

- Scholarship applications for regional students are open, with many closing around mid-March.
- Applications for graduating seniors looking to attend college are available through the CFO website.
- The committee will review applications in April.

Director's Report

Ms. Prigge provided the following updates:

- Economic Development Administration (EDA) Reauthorization:
The EDA has been reauthorized by Congress for the first time since 2004. This is exciting news, as it could lead to:
 - Increased planning dollars.
 - Reduced grant match requirements.
 - New definitions for distressed communities.
 This development is seen as a positive step forward for regional economic development.
- National Defense Bill:
 - The National Defense Bill has been passed, providing \$120 million for projects at Fort Leonard Wood, as well as other defense-related projects in Missouri (including at Whiteman Air Force Base).
 - This is a significant boost for local defense infrastructure.
- Hazard Mitigation Disaster Funds:
 - Some counties in the region are eligible for hazard mitigation disaster funds due to presidential disaster declarations for various natural disasters, including straight-line winds, tornadoes, and flooding.
 - This could provide opportunities for communities to apply for grants that help mitigate the effects of future disasters.
- CDBG Grants:
 - Two Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) projects have been funded:
 - Sayers Senior Center in Washington County.
 - Gasconade County project (likely involving roads and crossings).
 - 63 additional CDBG projects are under review by the Department of Economic Development Director. The team is hopeful that its third application will be funded.

Ms. Prigge also encouraged participants to keep an eye out for new opportunities and updates, especially regarding disaster recovery and mitigation grants.

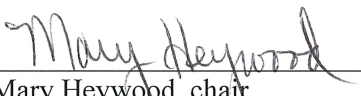
- State Budget Update:

- Governor Kehoe will present the State of the State Budget soon. This will reveal the governor's priorities and how they align with the organization's needs, and it will inform the upcoming discussions with state legislators and senators.
- MRPC Revised Budget Challenges:
 - The organization faced a \$100,000 deficit due to lower-than-expected income and higher-than-expected costs.
 - A difficult decision was made to have staff contribute 50% to their insurance premiums for the next five months to help balance the budget.
 - The organization has traditionally covered 100% of the insurance costs, but with a 10% annual increase in premiums, it's no longer sustainable at the current rate.
 - The organization is exploring options for higher deductible plans and working with staff to explore alternatives (like using the marketplace for insurance).
 - Grant Status:
 - The organization is awaiting a \$46,000 grant to help with the budget deficit. If the grant doesn't come through, further budget adjustments may be necessary.
 - County and State Budget Struggles:
 - Counties and the state are also facing budget difficulties, which is adding to the challenge of managing the organization's budget.

Ms. Prigge said she is hopeful for the grant and expressed her gratitude for the board's support during this challenging time.

Adjourn

Commissioner Jason Ward made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:48 p.m. Steve Vogt seconded the motion. The motion carried.



 Mary Heywood, chair



 Attest

