

**Meramec Regional Planning Commission
Minutes
September 11, 2025**

Call to Order

Vice Chair Joey Auxier called the Sept. 11, 2025, meeting of the Meramec Regional Planning Commission to order at 7:31 p.m. The meeting was conducted in person and via Zoom.

Welcome

Vice Chair Auxier welcomed everyone to the meeting. Board members participating in person were Jason Ward, Erik Lowes, Gary Larson, Duane Kraettli, Tim Schulte, Vic Stratman, Steve Vogt, Ray Schwartz, Joey Auxier, Tom Coots, Kent Bagnall, Sean Wilson, T.R. Dudley, Earl Brown, Donald Claycomb, Matt McCarter, John Money, Jan Haviland, Steve Smyth, John Casey and Mary Heywood. MRPC staff members participating in person were Bonnie Prigge, Tammy Snodgrass, Linda Loughridge, Caitlin Jones and Linda Carroll. Board members participating via Zoom were Taisia Gordan and Patricia Heaney. Donald Keeney and Anne Freand with MRPC participated via Zoom. Guests Ed Hassinger, MoDOT and Grant Wilson with Rep. Jason Smith's office participated in-person.

Consent Agenda

The following consent agenda items were presented for approval:

a. Minutes – Aug. 14, 2025

b. Local Review
None.

c. State Review

1. Missouri Highway and Transportation Commission, Jefferson City, MO
20.106 – Airport Improvement Program, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
Programs, and COVID-19 Airports Program
Increase airport safety, maintain existing pavements, and construct new infrastructure. (City of Boonville, City of Brookfield, City of Eldon, City of Fulton, City of Hannibal, City of Houston, City of Poplar Bluff)
Federal: \$1,614,793
Local: \$84,990
Total: \$1,699,783
2. Missouri Highway and Transportation Commission, Jefferson City, MO
20.106 – Airport Improvement Program, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
Programs, and COVID-19 Airports Program
Increase airport safety, maintain existing pavements, and construct new infrastructure.
(Caruthersville (MO5), Cuba (UBX), Mountain Grove (1MO), Neosho (EOS), Perryville (PCD), Piedmont (PYN), Sullivan (UUV).
Federal: \$1,891,545
Local: \$99,562
Total: \$1,991,107
3. Missouri Highway and Transportation Commission, Jefferson City, MO
20.106 – Airport Improvement Program, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
Programs, and COVID-19 Airports Program
Increase airport safety, maintain existing pavements, and construct new infrastructure. (Dexter (DXE), Houston (M48), Moberly (MBY), Mosby (GPH), Rolla (VIH), Sikeston (SIK), St. Louis - Creve Coeur (1H0)).
Federal: \$2,658,018
Local: \$139,899

Total: \$2,797,917

4. Missouri Highway and Transportation Commission, Jefferson City, MO
20.106 – Airport Improvement Program, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Programs, and COVID-19 Airports Program
Increase airport safety, maintain existing pavements, and construct new infrastructure. (Branson West Municipal (FWB), State Technical College of Missouri (IH3), City of Maryville (EVU), University of Central Missouri (RCM), City of West Plains (UNO)).
Federal: \$1,712,356
State: \$30,791
Local: \$59,338
Total: \$1,802,485
5. University of Missouri System, Columbia, MO
47.070 – Computer and Information Science and Engineering
Collaborative Research: VINES: Track 1: AI-Native Metapath Synthesis and Adaptive Service Function Embedding in NextG Networks for Smart Agriculture
Federal: \$840,000
Total: \$840,000

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

- Economic Development Administration

Permission is requested for the chair and/or executive director to sign all necessary documents for application to the Economic Development Administration for a Disaster Resiliency grant to hire a disaster coordinator and develop disaster resiliency plans within qualifying counties. Permission is also requested for the chair and/or executive director to sign all necessary documents, should a grant agreement be issued.

- Delta Regional Authority

Permission is requested for the chair and/or executive director to sign all necessary documents for application to the Delta Regional Authority for a Local Development District grant to provide grant writing and planning services within the DRA counties. Permission is also requested for the chair and/or executive director to sign all necessary documents, should a grant agreement be issued.

- Community Foundation of the Ozarks

Permission is requested for the chair and/or executive director to submit a grant application to the L-A-D Foundation through the Community Foundation of the Ozarks for the illustration and production of an illegal dump children's book featuring Trashasaurus Rex. Permission is also requested for the chair and/or executive director to sign all necessary documents, should the grant be awarded.

- National Forest Foundation

Permission is requested for the chair and/or executive director to submit a grant application to the National Forest Foundation Collaborative Capacity Program for the illustration and production of an illegal dump children's book featuring Trashasaurus Rex. MRPC would work with the volunteer organization, Heartland Trail Trash, on the book. Permission is also requested for the chair and/or executive director to sign all necessary documents, should the grant be awarded.

- Ozark Rivers Solid Waste Management District

Permission is requested to apply for a grant to fund solid waste programs: illegal dump cleanups; special collections for tires, white goods and electronics; community funds for mini-grants; environmental education; and HHW collection sites in St. Robert and Rolla. Permission is also requested for MRPC's chairman and/or executive director to sign any necessary documents, for application, and any grant contracts, should an award be offered.

- City of Dixon

Sept. 9, 2025: MRPC Executive Director entered into a technical assistance contract with the city of Dixon for a mold inspection at the city hall at 305 S. Elm, Dixon, MO 65459

- City of Stoutland

Sept. 11, 2025: MRPC Executive Director signed a contract amendment with the city of Stoutland for additional inspection services related to its demolition project. Additional cost is anticipated to be \$1,000.

Commissioner Ray Schwartze made a motion to approve the consent agenda with noted additions; Commissioner John Casey seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Presentation: Ed Hassinger, Director of the Missouri Department of Transportation

Director Hassinger provided an update on MoDOT's priorities and projects. He reported MoDOT is continuing to implement its five-year plan and is in the process of updating the unfunded needs list. He also outlined his four main priorities: delivering the program, restoring operations capability, focusing on safety and improving customer service.

The director highlighted the importance of restoring relationships and improving communication within the state's transportation sector. He discussed the department's achievements, including the completion of bridge replacements, significant improvements in road conditions, and the rapid implementation of projects funded by recent state and federal investments. He emphasized the need to continue delivering projects on time and within budget, noting that Missouri has a strong track record in this area.

He highlighted improvements in staffing and operations after addressing salary issues that led to significant vacancies. The director emphasized the importance of safety, noting a 5% decrease in fatalities over the past two years but expressing frustration over the lack of public concern about the monthly road deaths. Director Hassinger also stressed the need for better customer service and community engagement, stating that while technology can be useful, many issues require personal interaction.

Director Hassinger discussed two major ongoing projects: a long-range transportation plan that includes addressing declining gas tax revenue due to more efficient vehicles, and a state rail and freight plan affected by an upcoming railroad merger. He highlighted challenges including inflation impacts on construction costs and the need to consider indexing fuel or sales taxes to maintain revenue. He also mentioned Missouri's position on the upcoming Federal transportation bill, favoring formula funding over discretionary grants, and noted that asset management currently accounts for 84% of their budget, emphasizing the importance of maintaining existing infrastructure before new projects.

The director discussed the need to update Missouri's vehicle tax system to make it more equitable for electric and hybrid vehicles. He suggested increasing the annual fee for electric vehicles, which is currently \$100-135, to make it more comparable to the fees paid by drivers of traditional vehicles. He also proposed updating the registration fee structure to be based on miles per gallon rather than horsepower, which would better reflect a vehicle's impact on roads and infrastructure. The director emphasized that these changes could be implemented without requiring a vote of the people and would be more cost-effective than implementing a vehicle miles traveled system.

He discussed legislative challenges in implementing public policy changes and highlighted the need for the legislature to address driver safety and mentioned ongoing efforts to improve highway safety through engineering and behavioral changes. The director also addressed the allocation of funds for upgrading railroad crossings, noting progress made with passenger rail corridors and challenges with freight corridors, as well as the need to finalize projects this year to avoid reallocation by the legislature.

Several transportation and safety concerns were raised by board members. Concerns mentioned included unsafe driving practices on I-44, including vehicles pulling multiple cars. Director Hassinger suggested talking to the local highway patrol commander about addressing these issues. Concerns were raised about the condition of Highway 89 from 50 to Chamois, noting it was scheduled to receive a one-inch overlay next year, which was thought to be inadequate for the road's needs. The director explained that the state has an asset management plan for all roads, with a 20-year horizon for planning treatments, and offered to have the asset management team speak to the TAC about this process.

Director Hassinger discussed the new corridor project on Route 63, emphasizing its focus on safety due to high fatality rates in the area. He mentioned the challenges of balancing public feedback, which included concerns about property impacts and interchange locations, with project goals. The director explained that the team is reviewing comments to make necessary adjustments and will present the project to the Commission for approval of location and design before proceeding with final design and right-of-way acquisition. He also provided updates on other highway projects, including improvements on I-44, highlighting a shift toward more project development and less asset management work.

Updates from State and Federal Legislators:

Grant Wilson, with Congressman Jason Smith's office, provided updates on the Congressman's recent activities, including his annual farm tour and legislative achievements benefiting farmers. He highlighted tax provisions that were made permanent, such as the 99% small business deduction and increased 1099 reporting threshold. Mr. Wilson reported that Congressman Smith launched an investigation into the Kentucky organ donor affiliate's practices and has requested full implementation of the No Surprises Act.

External Relations Committee: Tim Schulte, vice chair

Presiding Commissioner Schulte reported on External Relations activities as follows:

The committee discussed the need to fill several at-large commissioner positions, seniors, lending and the underrepresented. The committee received nominations for the seniors and lending positions. Marla Stevenson of Rolla was nominated to represent lending and Paul Stratman of Freeburg, was nominated to represent seniors. Both were approved by the committee and recommended to the full board.

Commissioner Steve Vogt made a motion to approve the nomination of Marla Stevenson to represent lending and Paul Stratman to represent seniors. Commissioner Jason Ward seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Presiding Commissioner Schulte reported annual dinner invitations went out in the mail earlier in the week and RSVPs are due Oct. 9 for the Oct. 23 event.

Operations Committee: Jason Ward, chair

Commissioner Ward reported on operations activities as follows:

The committee reviewed the MRPC/MRB and MRPC/RLF program financial statements for the period ended Aug. 31, 2025.

Commissioner Ward made a motion to approve the financials for the period ending Aug. 31, 2025; Commissioner Sean Wilson seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Linda Loughridge explained that the salary ranges for all positions have been adjusted by a 19.2% increase based on the Department of Labor's cost of living adjustments over the past five years, as a temporary measure until a full market comparison can be conducted in the spring. She clarified that this adjustment does not impact the budget or current employees' salaries, as the budget approved in July already accounted for necessary increases to ensure new hires would not fall below the updated ranges. She also mentioned that staff retention remains a concern, particularly given some employees' discussions about retirement, and she emphasized the importance of keeping salaries competitive in the current market.

Commissioner Jason Ward made a motion to approve the salary range adjustment; Commissioner Jan Haviland seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Planning Committee: Joey Auxier, chair

Presiding Commissioner Auxier reported on planning activities as follows:

Presiding Commissioner Auxier reported that the committee discussed potential dates in March 2026, locations and other planning activity items for the FY26 MRPC Board Retreat and Training.

Anne Freand, MRPC Planning Manager, reported on an Economic Development Administration (EDA) disaster resiliency grant which, if awarded, would allow MRPC to hire a Disaster Resiliency coordinator to assist with grant writing for disaster related events and some disaster planning projects in counties included in the 2023 and 2024 Disaster Declarations. The grant would cover work in all counties with the exception of Gasconade and Osage. The EDA will look at the first round of applications in October.

Housing Advisory Board: Tim Schulte, chair

Presiding Commissioner Schulte reported on planning activities as follows:

The board approved financials for fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, and for month ending Aug. 31, 2025.

Presiding Commissioner Schulte also reported a change in board officers. Steve Black moved up to chair, Gary Larson moved into the vice chair position, and Vic Stratman was elected secretary.

Donald Keeney, Housing Program Manager, provided an update on the waiting list and voucher closure list.

Environmental: Caitlin Jones

Ms. Jones mentioned that there would be a special collection in Salem on Sept. 13 and in Owensville on Oct. 18.

She reported that the next Ozark Rivers meeting is set for Sept. 16, and the next Homeland Security meeting is set for Oct. 2. The Meramec Local Emergency Planning meeting will meet on Nov. 5.

A handout of environmental activities was provided.

Bonnie Prigge, executive director, mentioned that Pulaski, Phelps and Gasconade counties have hazard mitigation plans expiring in 2026. Pulaski's expires in February 2026, Phelps in July 2026 and Gasconade in December 2026. SEMA staff has secured funding for the Pulaski County plan, and MRPC has requested an extension as the plan could not be updated in two months. Funding for the Gasconade County plan also fell through but SEMA is looking for other grants. There has been no word on funding for the Phelps County plan. Due to funding delays, all of the plans will expire before they can be updated.

She also reported that without an updated hazard mitigation plan, schools, counties and non-profits would be unable to maintain eligibility for certain grants.

Mr. Wilson, with Congressman Smith's office, said he would take those concerns back to the Congressman.

Meramec Community Enhancement Corporation (MCEC): Vic Stratman

No report was given.

Meramec Regional Community Foundation (MRCF): Bonnie Prigge

No report was given.

Chairman's Report

No report was given.

Director's Report

Ms. Prigge reported that annual award nominees should have received their letters notifying them of their awards. She informed the board that annual dues letters would be going out tomorrow.

She mentioned that she and Caitlin Jones would be attending the Roadway Safety Conference next week.

Ms. Prigge briefly discussed the \$17 million Build Planning Grant for the Rock Island Trail project from Windsor near Kansas City to Union. She mentioned the project may face funding challenges and highlighted the need for a clear termination clause in the contract. She expressed her concerns to Mr. Wilson regarding costs incurred up to termination. As it stands now, she said it wasn't clear if costs incurred up to termination would be reimbursed through the grant.

Ms. Jones reminded board members that MRPC has roadway stencils to lend.

Adjourn

Commissioner Ray Schwartz made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:06 p.m. Commissioner Jason Ward seconded the motion. The motion carried.



Joey Auxier, vice chair

Attest


