

ABOUT MRPC

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

The mission of MRPC is to enhance the quality of life for residents of the Meramec Region. In pursuit of this mission, MRPC will bring about results in these areas:

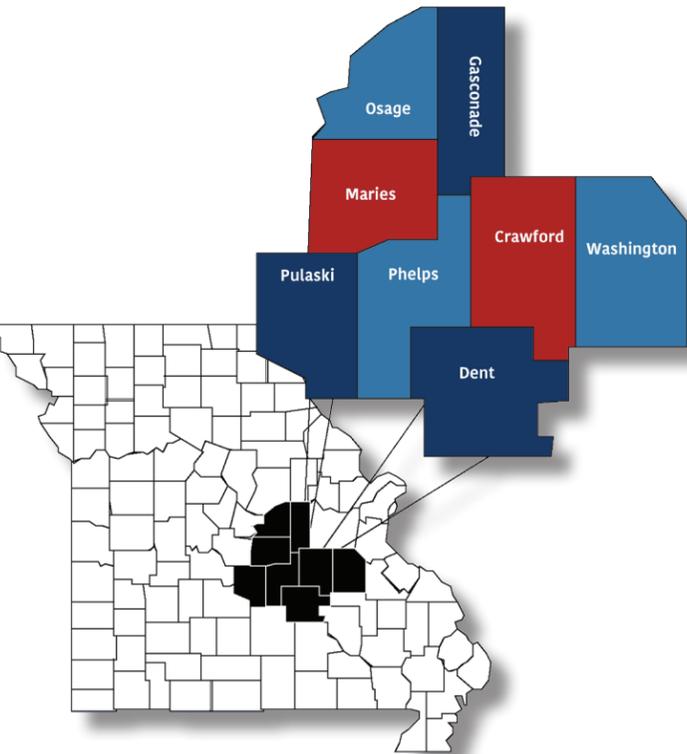
- Cleaner, healthier and safer communities,
- Greater socio-economic and cultural wealth through community and economic development, and
- A stronger, unified voice in the legislative process.

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This report will be emailed to all Meramec Region Legislative Officials in early 2026.



A Voluntary Council of Local Governments Since 1969



Members of the Meramec Region's Congressional Delegation:

The Honorable Sens. Josh Hawley and Eric Schmitt
Reps. Jason Smith, Mark Alford and Bob Onder

The Meramec Regional Planning Commission, representing eight counties and their respective cities, is pleased to present its 2026 Federal Priorities agenda to you. In addition to our specific priorities, we encourage efforts that create jobs and offer grant funding to address critical needs for rural areas, like ours. We look forward to working with you, and we thank you in advance for your consideration of our 2026 Federal Priorities.

Sincerely,

Darryl Griffin
MRPC Chairman

Bonnie J. Prigge
Executive Director

2026



Federal Priorities in the Missouri Meramec Region

Prepared by: Meramec Regional Planning Commission
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The Meramec Regional Planning Commission Board hereby shares its identified, prioritized and approved 2026 Federal Legislative Issues. While the categories are in no particular order, the priorities beneath each category head are listed in priority order.

ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:

- Advocate for and fully fund the existing portfolio of federal community and economic development programs, most notably the Economic Development Administration's (EDA's) infrastructure, economic adjustment assistance and district planning grant programs and HUD's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. Delta Regional Authority (DRA) and Small Business Administration (SBA) business lending programs. Rural areas depend heavily on these programs for infrastructure improvements. Specifically:
 - Reauthorize and fully fund EDA, and include (1) A provision that planning grants will be increased if appropriations are increased and (2) A provision that would lower the local government cost share on grants;
 - Fully fund USDA rural development grant programs for infrastructure improvements, businesses development, community facilities, housing and broadband services.
- Continue to provide equitable solutions and increased funding for deteriorating critical infrastructure in rural and impoverished communities to assure access to clean water and sanitary sewers; adequate roads and bridges; walkable sidewalks; and accessible recreational facilities.
- Support housing affordability and quality through: (1) Affordable Housing Initiatives: Recommend federal incentives for affordable housing development in rural areas, addressing a growing need for accessible housing options for low-income families, veterans and military families. This could include additional HUD-CDBG funds dedicated to affordable housing development. (2) Home Repair Assistance: Expand programs that provide grants or low-interest loans for home repairs, prioritizing rural areas to improve housing safety and stability.
- Provide additional tax incentives and/or grants for small businesses and start-ups.
- Fund Missouri S&T's Tech Hub application to EDA that would provide funds for a test bed facility to find efficient ways to extract critical minerals, which would transform Missouri's mining industry and ensure access to critical minerals for national security and defense.
- Continue to support and promote Fort Leonard Wood using the results of the FLW Joint Land Use Study and Missouri's Military Infrastructure Report. Fort Leonard Wood is an economic engine that puts over \$2 billion annually into the Missouri economy.

TRANSPORTATION:

- Support passage of a long-term transportation reauthorization bill that strengthens rural and regional planning, empowers local decision-making and increases funding for local transportation priorities which include interstate road repairs, U.S. highways and bridges.
- Provide additional funding for air and rail expansion and services as well as multi-modal hubs to facilitate the delivery of goods and services. Increase, improve and expand ports to eliminate transportation bottlenecks and increase supply routes.
- Construct the necessary four-lane bridges now, rather than later, to accommodate the increase in large truck traffic for projects that will eventually become four-lane highways, such as U.S. Highways 63 and 50.

ENVIRONMENT:

- Sell no land to adversarial foreign interests, especially near military bases.
- Oppose the sale of federal lands outside the guidelines established by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and protect our national parks, monuments, wildlife reserves and public lands for future generations.

HOMELAND SECURITY & EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS:

- Fully fund FEMA and ensure that they are more responsive to local government needs for disaster losses through the

Public Assistance program after a major federal disaster declaration.

- Improve/address border security. Implement jail time for criminals on the terrorist want list. Implement major jail time for drug smugglers. The U.S. should consider a better way to assist, and make it easier, for those who want to enter the country through the legal process and become productive citizens.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ISSUES:

- Reduce match on federal grants. Small communities cannot provide 40-50 percent match on large projects.
- Preserve the current tax exemption for municipal bonds. Tax-exempt financing, used by both state and local governments, to raise funds to finance public capital improvements is critical to sustain economic growth.

HEALTH CARE & SOCIAL SERVICES:

- Address critical healthcare workforce shortages in rural areas by establishing talent pipelines and training efforts, such as the Work Opportunities for Rural Communities (WORC) Grant in Washington County, funded by the Delta Regional Authority and the Department of Labor and coordinated through Meramec Regional Planning Commission, Washington County Ambulance District, Great Mines Health Center, and others. Continue to adequately fund and expand the State Loan Repayment Program (SLRP), the National Health Service Corps through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), which provides loan forgiveness to those who agree to practice in rural areas and the J-1 Visa Program to address the critical shortage of doctors, dentists, nurses, and psychiatrists in rural areas. Promote workforce development to specifically address rural physician recruitment and retention, workplace violence and oppose minimum staffing ratios.
- Increase support for small hospitals and clinics in small communities. Assure adequate funding for Critical Access Rural Hospitals and more fully understand their importance to not only regional health needs but also local economic factors.
- Incentivize and increase funding for states and communities to evaluate and address gaps in preventative care services, so that individuals receive appropriate interventions before a behavioral health condition becomes acute.

EDUCATION:

- Expand vocational education opportunities and training through federal incentives. Increase funding for workforce training to address critical shortages in key areas such as healthcare, advanced manufacturing, technology and skilled trades, including carpenters, plumbers, electricians, HVAC workers, mechanics, etc.
- Fully fund and support the core missions of the Department of Education to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering education excellence and ensuring equal access to all learners.

ENERGY:

- Continue to explore opportunities to decrease our dependence on foreign fuel consumption by incentivizing environmentally conscious American resources and focus on the U.S. being energy independent by accessing our own oil production.
- 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 grid.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Encourage production in the U.S. and not overseas for items, especially computer chips, to become less dependent on foreign sources. Provide incentives to bring manufacturing back to the U.S.
- Streamline the postal service to make it more efficient, such as separating local and out of town mail, so that local does not have to go to a regional center and then be sent back.
- Ensure election security and stop mail-in ballots.