

2026



State Priorities in the Meramec Region

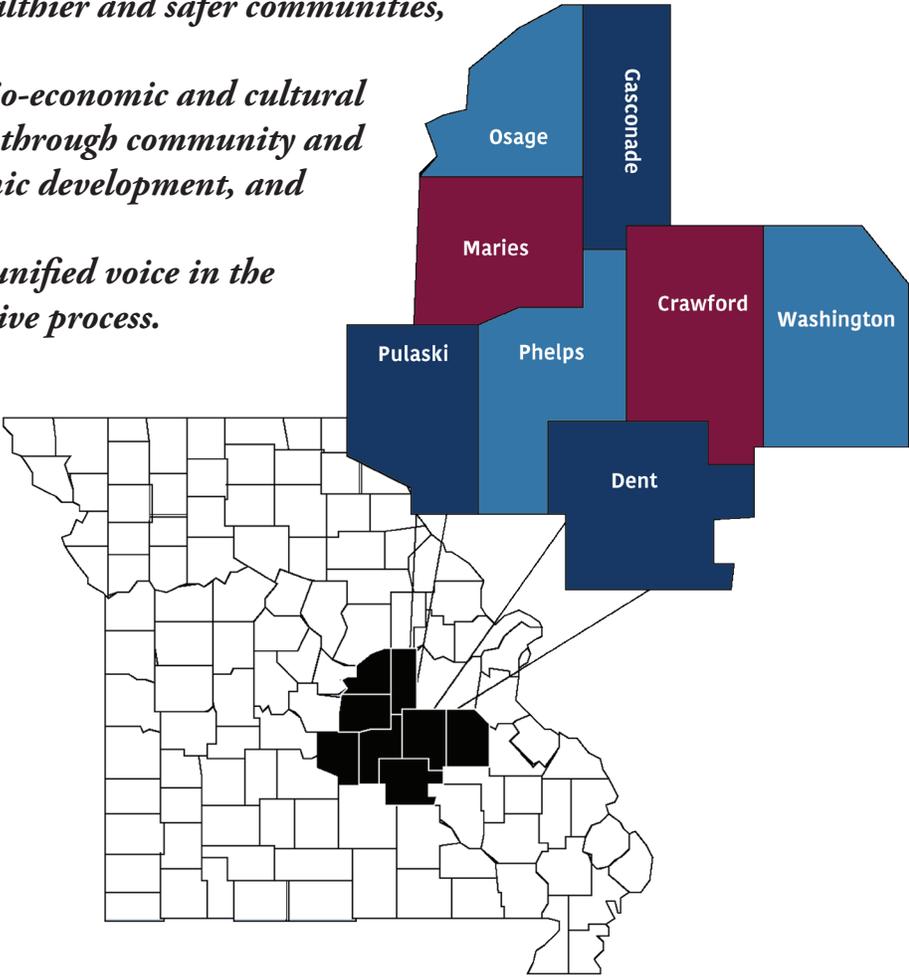
An Issues Report For the Region's Legislative Delegation

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The Meramec Regional Planning Commission's Mission

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

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



The Meramec Regional Planning Commission is a voluntary council of local governments serving the Meramec area. The MRPC area includes the eight counties of Crawford, Dent, Gasconade, Maries, Osage, Phelps, Pulaski and Washington and their respective cities. Those cities are Bourbon, Cuba, Leasburg, Steelville, Sullivan, West Sullivan, Salem, Bland, Gasconade, Hermann, Morrison, Owensville, Rosebud, Belle, Vienna, Argyle, Chamois, Freeburg, Linn, Meta, Westphalia, Doolittle, Edgar Springs, Newburg, Rolla, St. James, Crocker, Dixon, Richland, St. Robert, Waynesville, Caledonia, Irondale, Mineral Point and Potosi.

2026 STATE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES IN THE MERAMEC REGION

As the 2026 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. Provide general revenue for maintaining and improving rural roads and bridges.
3. Provide increased funding and more locally equitable match component for the transportation cost-share programs, perhaps allowing for an in-kind match component with less cash match required for cost-share programs in rural areas.

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

1. Advocate for incentives (tax breaks or grants) for small businesses and startups in rural areas to stimulate local economies. This includes extending the life of Enhanced Enterprise Zones beyond 25 years.
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. Establish incentives to encourage housing development as well as encourage policies that promote affordable housing projects in rural areas.
4. Support legislation that would raise the cap on state aid to RPCs to \$50,000 per year, subject to state appropriation.
5. Fully support Fort Leonard Wood and recognize that it is an economic development engine for Missouri.

ENVIRONMENTAL:

1. Advocate for funding to improve aging water and wastewater treatment facilities in rural communities.
2. Support recycling and reduce trash costs for those who do recycle through incentives to municipalities and the trash collection companies that serve them to develop and maintain recycling efforts that are convenient and accessible for the average citizen. This includes continued funding for the State's Solid Waste Management Districts
3. Support initiatives for protecting natural resources, particularly water quality protection (Clean Water State Revolving Fund) and sustainable forestry management.

HEALTH CARE/SOCIAL SERVICE:

1. 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.

2. Assure adequate funding for rural hospitals, clinics, telehealth services to improve healthcare accessibility for rural areas and realize their importance not only to regional healthcare but also to local economies.
3. Increase incentives for doctors and health providers to serve in smaller communities.

EDUCATION:

1. Provide adequate funding for rural school districts, especially those in impoverished areas. The state should pay the same amount per student statewide.
2. Provide incentives for schools to reinstate shop-building trades, family and consumer education and driver's education in secondary and physical education in elementary and secondary education.
3. Provide adequate funding to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to ensure schools can add instructional coaching in reading/literacy for K-3 teachers and training for literacy coaches and reading specialists in all Missouri elementary schools.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (CITY/COUNTY):

1. Oppose any legislation that would erode the taxing authority of municipalities and counties or remove existing taxing revenues from municipalities and counties/taxing districts. This includes fixing issues created by SB-3 and SB-190, if not found unconstitutional by the courts.
2. Lower grant match requirements for 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. Expand RSMO 79.235 that allows fourth class cities with fewer than 3,000 inhabitants to appoint non-residents to non-elected boards and commissions to include villages.
4. Define the slot-style gaming machines as either legal or not legal gambling machines.
5. Oppose the elimination of personal property tax. Replacement revenue would have to come from sales tax hike.

GENERAL:

1. Support the development of and provide funding for additional day care options throughout the state. Many people have not returned to the workforce because they are not able to find daycare for their children.
2. Support adoption and ways to streamline and expedite the adoption process and reduce financial costs to adopting families.
3. Establish Missouri Critical/Rare Earth Minerals Recovery Council to spearhead efforts to reclaim and process critical and rare earth minerals in Missouri. This council would bring together state and federal agencies, universities, mining industries and other key stakeholders to position the state as a strategic source and processor of these minerals.

Highlights of 2025 Accomplishments

MRPC's Impact

The Meramec Regional Planning Commission had a strong year in 2024-25. 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.



The MRPC delegation was invited to the House Floor to take a group picture with Representatives Bennie Cook (left), Tony Harbison (fifth from right) and Tara Peters (right). These individuals met with MRPC staff and board to discuss legislative issues prior to the picture in Representative Bruce Sassmann's office.

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. This year, MoDOT continues to work with the planning organizations to facilitate multimodal transportation advisory committees that discuss transit, bike and pedestrian, rail, airports and port needs separate from road and bridge projects. In FY 2024-25, MRPC created a Multimodal Transportation Advisory Committee to provide greater emphasis on transit, aviation, bicycle-pedestrian and rails needs and involve subject-matter experts in the discussion.

MRPC's Transportation Advisory Committee (Road and Bridge) held six meetings, while the newly formed Multimodal Transportation Advisory Committee held three meetings in 2024-25. The Road and Bridge TAC 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. MRPC also continued to make the speed trailer/traffic counter available to local jurisdictions that require information for 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 section of Highways DD and U in Osage 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 - Gasconade County road project, Bland street project, Irondale street reconstruction, Potosi bridge replacement and Meta culvert/drainage improvements. MRPC secured grants totaling \$2,235,136 to advance these local transportation projects.

MRPC has continued its work developing Active Living Community of Practice and Active Transportation Plans for communities in the Meramec Region. These plans, funded by Missouri Department of Senior Services and University of Missouri Extension, prioritize sidewalk, bicycle and other multimodal infrastructure that connect community areas of interest for overall user health and safety. Active transportation can boost local economies, increase physical health, improve the natural environment and provide affordable transportation access for all. To date, MRPC has developed Active Living Community of Practice and Active Transportation Plans focusing on pedestrian infrastructure for the Meramec Region communities of Rosebud, Bland, Belle, Salem, Caledonia, Potosi, Mineral Point, Bourbon, Steelville and Cuba. A second enhanced plan has also been completed for the city of Salem, focused on a dedicated bicycle network and support amenities. MRPC has tentative plans with grant funders to complete work for the communities of Irondale, Leasburg and a second enhanced plan for Potosi in 2026.

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 2024-25, over \$4 million in federal and state grant monies flowed through the planning and development department for community and economic development projects. In FY 2024-25, staff assisted member communities with the following funding opportunities:

- Delta Regional Authority's (DRA) States Economic Development Assistance Program (SEDAP) for Washington County to replace two low water crossings (Funded);
- Missouri Department of Natural Resource's (MDNR) Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) for the city of Owensville to replace eight street lights with energy efficient lights (Funded);
- Missouri Department of Economic Development's (MoDED) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) - General Infrastructure for the city of Bland to upgrade the main streets in town with drainage and pavement improvements (Funded);
- MoDED's CDBG - Community Facilities for the city of Potosi on behalf of the Washington County Council on Aging to make renovations to the Sayers Senior Center (Funded);
- MoDED's CDBG - General Infrastructure for Gasconade County to upgrade Old Hwy 19, City Cemetery Road and Tappmeyer Road (Funded);
- Missouri Department of Transportation's (MoDOT) Missouri Regional Bridge Program for Pulaski County to replace the bridge on Beaumont Road (Not Funded);
- MoDOT's Missouri Regional Bridge Program for Pulaski County to replace the bridge on Riverside Road (Not Funded);
- MoDOT's Missouri Regional Bridge Program for Pulaski County to replace the bridge on Rosebud Road (Funded);
- Community Foundation of the Ozarks' (CFO) Coover Regional Youth Mental Health Grant Program

for Meramec Community Enhancement Corporation (MCEC) to provide seeking safety mental health programs to six area high school classes (Not Funded);

- Waste Management Corporation's WM Charitable Giving for MCEC to continue environmental education programs in the Ozark Rivers Solid Waste Management District (Not Funded);
- MDNR's Land and Water Conservation Fund for the city of Rolla to upgrade lighting at one softball field and reconstruct the tennis courts (Not Funded);
- MDNR's Land and Water Conservation Fund for the city of Dixon to make improvements at the park including ADA pathway and parking, two new playground equipment areas and surfacing (Not Funded);
- MoDED's Digital Opportunity Grant for MCEC to purchase computers for area community facilities and provide training to public on the use of electronic devices and the internet (Not Funded);
- MDNR's Water Safety and Security Act Project (WSSA) for the city of Chamois to create updated GIS water system maps (Funded);
- Vichy Renewable Energy's Community Giving for MCEC to continue the county's Hazardous Materials Emergency Response Plan (Funded);
- Vichy Renewable Energy's Community Giving for the Gasconade Valley Enterprise Zone for economic development efforts in Maries County (Funded);
- MDNR's EECBG for the city of Hermann to replace 45 light poles with 42 LED light poles in the river-front park, city park, cemetery and along Bavarian Hills Plaza (Not Funded)
- MDNR's EECBG for the city of Salem to update street lighting throughout town with LED fixtures (Not Funded);
- USDA Rural Development's Solid Waste Management Grant Program for MRPC to update the solid waste management plan along with food waste feasibility study (Not Funded);
- Missouri Humanities Semi Quincentennial program for Washington County to host two historical performances during the Moses Austin Heritage Festival (Funded);
- MoDED's CDBG - Mitigation program for the city of Potosi on behalf of Great Mines Health Center to construct a disaster response facility to house vehicles, equipment and supplies for emergency responders (Not Funded);
- MoDED's CDBG - Mitigation program for the city of Salem to replace the existing outdated storm warning system with a new system (Not Funded);
- Bolger Foundation's grants for Temple in Training to build additions on existing facilities (Not Funded);
- Lowe's Hometown Grants for Bourbon Economic Development Group to continue Phase 2 of welcome center (Pending);
- CFO's Affiliate Action Program for Meramec Regional Community Foundation to supplement the available funding for its community grants in the 2025 and 2026 award cycles (Not Funded);
- EDA's Partnership Planning Grant for MRPC to maintain the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) (Funded);
- MoDOT's Highway Safety Program for MRPC to continue arrive alive docudramas (Funded);
- MoDOT's Highway Safety Program for MRPC to continue bike/ped safety programs at area schools (Funded);
- DRA's Strategic Planning Program for MRPC to complete Cuba's new comprehensive plan and capital improvement plan (Pending);
- DRA's Community Infrastructure Fund for the city of Rolla to upgrade the storm drainage infrastructure serving Rolla's downtown (Funded);

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- MDNR’s Playground Scrap Tire Surface Material Grant for city of Chamois to install bonded rubber surface at both parks in Chamois’s City Park (Not Funded);
- MDNR’s Playground Scrap Tire Surface Material Grant for city of Dixon to replace 10 old picnic tables (Funded); and
- MoDOT’s Transportation Alternatives Program for Washington County to make sidewalk improvements around county facilities (Funded).

Staff continued to disseminate funding information to member communities through grant alerts, workshops and community meetings. Additionally, staff continued to improve methods of resource research by placing more emphasis on searches via the Internet and expanded their knowledge on new funding opportunities, as well as maintaining an additional grant writer to address the increasing demand for those services. MRPC continued efforts to assist communities in meeting the need for affordable housing for low-to-moderate income families. Staff completed a five-year update of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which was completed in September 2024. The four main goals focus on economic development, infrastructure, healthy communities and housing. 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. MRPC operates several revolving loan funds (RLF), which were created with EDA grants, EDA CARES Act funds, and MO Dept. of Economic Development microenterprise funds as well as local matching funds.

The Meramec Region has offered Revolving Loan Funds since 1985, to assist in financing business start-ups and expansions. Using the RLF program, MRPC has created or retained 1,210 jobs at a cost of \$4,682 per job. EDA’s requirement is one job for every \$20,000 invested. Three initial EDA grants of \$840,470, plus matching funds of \$259,000 have fully revolved. The CARES ACT RLF of \$780,00 has been completely loaned to businesses. Some 93 loans worth \$5.67 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.

In 2025, MRPC worked with the Meramec Regional Development Corporation to decertify as a Certified Development Company and no longer packages SBA 504 Loans. Since 1991, MRPC/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. MRPC, in 2025, also returned its IRP loan funds to USDA. 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 217 grants, totaling \$4 million, to support local and regional projects. These grants have served businesses, local governments, schools and non-profits. The 2025 grant cycle provided funding for the Dixon Area Caring Recycling Center aside from the programs operated by MRPC on behalf of the district. 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. HHW served 1,350 households in FY 24-25. Recently vape products were added to the list of acceptable wastes. 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 917 and HB 2162, sponsored by Sen. Jamie Burger and Rep. David Dolan respectively, 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 cleanup program was eliminated in April of 2016, an MRPC grant project has financially assisted counties in the Ozark Rivers district with transporting and recycling 261 tons of illegally dumped tires collected by county road crews. Through the Ozark Rivers Solid Waste Management District's grant program, MRPC has organized 80 special waste collections since April 2003. These subsidized collections have recycled 798.87 tons of residential electronics, appliances and tires.

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 238 dump sites have been cleaned up, partnerships have been built and the region-wide survey has been updated. In doing so, an estimated 1006.37 tons of trash has been removed and properly disposed; and an estimated 15.5 tons of tires have been collected for recycling. The district has recruited 1,944 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



Members of the local emergency planning district, first responders and MRPC staff, met with state legislators to discuss the sunset of Tier 2 funds that funds hazardous materials planning efforts in the region.

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 FY25 the region was awarded \$99,414.08 through a total of seven 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) in October 2025. 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 FY 25, MRPC was awarded funds to review and update the Pulaski County Hazard Mitigation plan. That process is underway and a draft will be sent to State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) in June. Phelps and Gasconade Counties plans are also expiring in 2026. Due to the elimination of the BRIC

grant program at the federal level funds to review and update these plans have not been secured. 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. Phelps and Gasconade counties plans will expire, which means the counties and covered entities may not be eligible for some federal grants.

Staff continued work on a Military Installation Readiness Review (MIRR) with Fort Leonard Wood and the surrounding counties and cities that includes a hazard mitigation plan, housing study and tabletop exercise. This study is funded by the Department of Defense Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation. The MIRR is a tool for installations, communities and partnering entities to plan for and implement actions to make military installations and the communities around them better prepared for future disasters by reducing vulnerabilities and mitigating hazards. Benchmark Planning, a North Carolina consulting firm, was hired to conduct the resiliency study and PGAV, a St. Louis-based consulting firm, was hired to complete the housing study for the region. MRPC staff, lead by Assistant Director Tammy Snodgrass, planned and conducted the tabletop exercise with emergency response agencies.

Housing Assistance

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 FY2024-25, MRPC assisted, on average, 700 families each month by providing over \$3.4 million in rental assistance for the year. PHA staff performed 1,092 tenant inspections.

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.

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. In FY 2024-25, 65 families enrolled in the program, and eight clients successfully completed their FSS contracts and received their escrow accounts, which had a combined total of \$46,210.33.

MRPC provides staff assistance to the Phelps County Public Housing Agency board that meets four times a year to oversee its housing program.

Philanthropy

MRPC provides staffing for Meramec Regional Community Foundation (MRCF). MRCF is an outgrowth of MRPC and is an affiliate of the Community Foundation of the Ozarks (CFO). The foundation is committed to developing a legacy of giving for the Meramec Region. Its mission is to enhance the quality of life for current and future generations in the Meramec Region by establishing community foundations and perpetual, sustainable funds. As of June 2025, MRCF has 53 funds valued at over \$4.6 million. Of the 53 funds, 16 funds provided 25 scholarships to graduating seniors in the Meramec Region with total giving of \$46,500.

This year, MRCF awarded two community grants in the amounts of \$750 each, totaling \$1,500, with the goal on enhancing and building stronger communities in the region. Through its annual grant-making, MRCF awarded the Armed Services YMCA of Missouri and KidSight for community projects focusing on children in the Meramec Region. Each program received \$750. MRCF's grant cycle opens in October each year and awards grants in March.

After a tornado struck Phelps County and Rolla, MRCF and the Phelps County Community Foundation (PCCF) began collecting donations through the Phelps County Disaster Relief Fund to support local recovery. More than \$104,000 was raised and awarded through grants to nine nonprofits addressing tornado-related needs. Those receiving funds included the Phelps County Fair, The Salvation Army Phelps County Service Extension, the Phelps County Dream Center, the Phelps County Health Foundation, Russell House, The Community Partnership, Choices for People, Reedemer Lutheran Church and the Rolla Chamber Foundation.

Services to Local Governments

Ordinance Codification: Since 1975, MRPC has provided ordinance codification services to cities — including Potosi, Vienna, Newburg 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. In March 2026, MRPC will discontinue these services after assisting the cities with transitioning.

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. Additionally MRPC completes damage assessment inspections after floods. Floodplain administrative procedure guides were completed for all of these entities.

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 with code enforcement issues, under contract.

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

Organizational Management: MRPC provides staffing for the Gasconade Valley Enterprise Zone and the four Enhanced Enterprise Zones in Gasconade, Maries and Osage Counties. GVEZ has four meetings per year and hosts an annual meeting for the four EEZs. GVEZ also assists the three counties with the Certified Work Ready, Work Keys Testing in area high schools and building site listings on Missouri Location One.

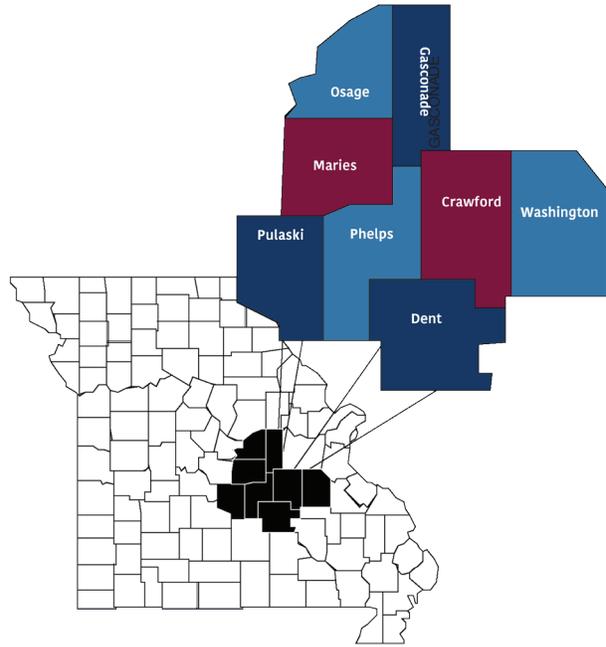
Meramec Region Facts

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

Note: The US Census Bureau plans to release the 2020-2024 5-year estimates for the American Community Survey on Jan. 29, 2026. For this report, the 2023 5-year estimates are the most current data for all sections other than manufactures in the region and unemployment data.

In 2023, the eight-county Meramec Region was home to 196,265 people, reflecting an increase of 181 people from the 2020 decennial census. Individual 2023 estimates county populations range from a low of 8,435 in Maries County to 53,850 in Pulaski County. Crawford, Gasconade, Pulaski and Washington counties saw a decrease in the 2023 ACS from the 2020 census. However, all other counties in the region, showed an increase in



population as reported in the 2023 ACS. Comparing the 2020 census data to the 2023 ACS data, the state of Missouri is estimated to have increased by .21% percent.

The largest city in the region continues to be Rolla, the county seat of Phelps County. It has 20,144 people by 2023 ACS estimates, down from 20,273 in 2020. The smallest city is Morrison in Gasconade County with 63 residents.

The region's population in 2023 showed slightly more males than females, just as it did in 2020. The region's median age in 2023 was 40.3 years, which is slightly older than the median age in the state and nation. The median age in the region had no change from 2022 to 2023 ACS data.

The region is predominantly white with a 13.4 percent minority population according 2023 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.

Demographics 2023

Population.....	196,265
White	86.58%
Black.....	3.77%
Asian.....	1.5%
American Indian.....	0.36%
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific.....	0.24%
Some Other Race.....	0.81%
Two or More Races	6.75%

Source: 2023 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis

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 2023 ACS information, was \$60,776.13. The state median income was \$68,920 while the U.S. median income was \$78,538.

The region’s median income is 88.18 percent of the state’s rate and only 77.38 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 2023 ACS data.

The region’s poverty rate also runs higher than the state and nation’s. Meramec residents living in poverty in 2023 numbered 26,208, which represents 14 percent of the population. This is an decrease from 2022’s 14.2 percent, and higher than

Median Household Incomes

Meramec Region	\$60,776.13
Missouri	\$68,920
U.S.....	\$78,538
Region as % of State.....	88.18%
Region as % of Nation.....	77.38%

Source: 2023 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis

Household Income

Households in the region.....	72,831
Under \$10,000.....	5.09%
\$10,000-14,999	5.44%
\$15,000-24,999	9%
\$25,000-34,999	9.26%
\$35,000 & over	71.23%

Source: 2023 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis

Persons in Poverty

Meramec Region	14%
Missouri	12%
U.S.....	12.5%

Source: 2023 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis

Population by Age

Under 5.....	5.77%
0-17	21.91%
18 & Over	78.09%
65+	16.48%
Median Age.....	40.3 years

Source: 2023 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis

the state’s 12 percent and the national’s 12.5 percent. Washington County had the highest poverty rate in the region with 18.2 percent. The lowest was Osage County with 9.8 percent.

The region, for several decades, has been plagued with high unemployment rates. Washington and Dent counties experienced mine closings while other counties lost shoe and textile manufacturers. For the past few years, the region’s counties have experienced decreases in their unemployment

Unemployment

Employed	81,885
Unemployed	3,693
Total Labor Force.....	85,578
Region’s unemployment rate.....	4.27%
State’s unemployment rate.....	4.22%
U.S. unemployment rate.....	4.31%

*All data compiled by averaging Jan. to Sept. 2025 data.
Source: Missouri Department of Economic Development, MRPC

rates. Despite COVID-19 layoffs, the average unemployment rate for the region from January to September 2025 was 4.27 percent, slightly higher than the state average at 4.22 percent in 2025 and 3.73 percent in 2024. The U.S. average for Jan.-Sept. 2025 was 4.31 percent.

Housing

The Meramec Region has 86,969 total housing units with 72,831 occupied, according to the 2023 ACS data. The average number of individuals per unit in the region is 2.4 people, which is

slightly higher than the state average of 2.34 people according to the 2023 ACS number.

The number of occupied housing units in the region for 2023 was 72,831, which is decreasing from the 73,371 2022 and from the 73,833 in 2020 census.

Of the 72,831 occupied units in 2023, 50,517 are owner occupied while 22,314 are renter occupied. In 2023, the median value of a home in the region was \$173,300, compared to a state average of \$215,600. The average monthly rent for a home in the region in 2023 was \$735.50 while the state average was \$996. The majority of the housing stock — 78.64 percent — was built between 1960 and present, as indicated by the 2023 ACS five-year estimates. These numbers remain the newest most accurate estimates at this time.

Education Levels

2023 percent of adults 25 years and older with at least a high school diploma.

Meramec Region	89.3%
Missouri	89.02%
U.S.....	89.78%

Source: 2023 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis

Education Levels

Some 89.36 percent of the region’s population aged 25 and older have at least a high school diploma, according to the 2023 ACS five-year estimates. This percentage is .34 percent higher than the state and .4 percent less than the U.S. When compared to the 2022 percentage of 89.2 percent, the region improved in the percentage of adults 25 years and older who had at least a high school diploma by .1 percent.

The region’s most educated county in 2023 was Pulaski, with 94.05 percent of adults with high school diplomas or higher education level.

The Economy

Over the years, the region has diversified its

Housing at a Glance

Number of housing units in region...	86,96
Number occupied	72,831
Number owner occupied.....	50,517
Number renter occupied.....	22,314
Vacant units	14,138
Persons per unit in region	2.4
Persons per unit in state	2.34
Median value in region	\$173,300
Median value in state.....	\$215,600
Median monthly rent in region	\$735.50
Median monthly rent in state	\$996
Housing units in region	
built before 1939.....	7,351
Housing units in region	
built 1940-59.....	9,422
Housing units in region	
built 1960-1979.....	20,629
Housing units in region	
built 1980-99.....	23,931
Housing units in region	
built 2000 and after.....	23,837

Source: 2023 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis

economy—after taking hard hits in the mining and textile industries 35 to 40 years ago. In the region, services was the largest employment sector with over 35,000 employees, followed by manufacturing and retail trade.

Health care, education and social assistance are the highest employment sectors in the region with 19,357 employees, which makes up 24.07 percent of employment in the region, according to 2023 ACS five-year estimates.

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

The 2025 Missouri Directory of Manufacturers listed 465 manufacturing firms in the region, compared to 454 in 2024.

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

Regional Industrial Employment

Employed persons 16 and over.....	80,436
Agriculture, forestry, fishing & mining	2,304
Construction	6,409
Manufacturing.....	10,285
Transportation/warehousing & utilities	3,789
Wholesale trade.....	1,615
Retail trade	9,969
Information.....	727
Finance, insurance, real estate & rental/leasing	2,551
Professional, scientific, mgmt., admin. & waste mgmt. ser.	5,041
Educational, health & social ser.....	19,357
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation & food ser.....	7,069
Other services	3,634
Public Administration	7,480

Source: 2023 ACS 5-year estimates and MRPC Analysis

Northern operates the most miles of track in the region. That rail line follows the general route of I-44 through Crawford, Phelps and Pulaski counties.

Rail service in the region is not as prevalent as it once was. Several miles of the former Rock Island rail have been neglected since the early 1990s. In 2015, Missouri Central Railroad railbanked the line in December 2021, the state of Missouri accepted the 144 miles of railbed, making it a part of the Missouri State Parks system. The development of 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. 2026

CRAWFORD COUNTY

Ray Mortimeyer, representing the Mayor of Cuba
Erik Lowes, representing for-profit
Mary Heywood, representing the unemployed
Dave Lafferty, mayor of Bourbon
Jason Ward, representing the mayor of Steelville
Steve Black, presiding commissioner

DENT COUNTY

Earl Brown, representing people with disabilities
Shawn Bolerjack, representing the mayor of Salem
Gary Larson, presiding commissioner
John Smith, representing for-profit

GASCONADE COUNTY

Tim Schulte, presiding commissioner
Merilee Spurgeon, mayor of Bland
Shannon Grus, mayor of Rosebud
Kevin McFadden, mayor of Owensville
Debbie Green, mayor of Gasconade
Jason Koenigsfeld, representing the mayor of
Morrison
Duane Kraettli, representing for-profit
Patricia Heaney, representing the mayor of Her-
mann

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

Dr. Don Claycomb, representing education
Tammy Massman, mayor of Westphalia
Ivie Helton, mayor of Meta
Darryl Griffin, presiding commissioner
Darryl Haller, chairman of Freeburg
Jan Haviland, representing industry
Dwight Massey, mayor of Linn

Colby Davis, chairman of Argyle
Marie Slusser, mayor of Chamois
Steve Smyth, representing for-profit

PHELPS COUNTY

John Money, representing healthcare
Thomas Robinson, mayor of Edgar Springs
Kent Bagnall, representing for-profit
Richard Elder, representing the mayor of Newburg
Dawn Bell/Tom Coots, representing the mayor of
Rolla
Kory Maune, mayor of Doolittle
Shane Anselm, representing labor
Joey Auxier, presiding commissioner
Leann Demouche, representing the mayor of St.
James
Taisia Gordon, representing small business
Matt McCarter, representing farming/agri business
Aimee Campbell, representing tourism
Marla Stevenson, representing lending institutions

PULASKI COUNTY

Paul Stratman, representing seniors
Michael Dunbar, representing for-profit
Mary Wiles, mayor of Dixon
Sean Wilson, mayor of Waynesville
Jim Patton, mayor of Crocker
Gene Newkirk, presiding commissioner
James Breckenridge, mayor of St. Robert
Vacant, representing minorities

WASHINGTON COUNTY

T.R. Dudley, representing for-profit
John Casey, representing transportation
Joseph Blount, mayor of Potosi
Kenny Cook, chairperson of Mineral Point
William Sanfilippo, mayor of Irondale
John Robinson III, chairman of Caledonia
Dave Sansegraw, presiding commissioner

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

2026 MRPC Leadership

Board & Staff

Chairman: Darryl Griffin, Osage County Presiding Commissioner
Vice Chairman:.....Joey Auxier, Phelps County Presiding Commissioner
Secretary:Sean Wilson, Waynesville Mayor
Treasurer:Jason Ward, representing Steelville
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

2026 Associate Members

MRPC's Associate Membership Program is an opportunity for business and industry to partner with MRPC to enhance and compliment economic development efforts in the region.

PLATINUM MEMBERS

Archer-Elgin - Engineering, Surveying &
Architecture
First Community National Bank
Legends Bank
The Maries County Bank
Brewer Science
Phelps County Bank

GOLD MEMBERS

Great River Engineering

SILVER MEMBERS

Argyle Catering
Bartlett & West - Rolla
McClure Engineering
Intercounty Electric

EXCHANGE MEMBERS

Owensville Area Chamber of Commerce
Salem Area Chamber of Commerce
Steelville Chamber of Commerce
Waynesville- St. Robert Chamber of Commerce
Rolla Area Chamber of Commerce

2026

**State Priorities
in the Meramec Region**



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

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT

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