



**Iowa Mississippi River Parkway Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
Monday November 21, 2016  
McCarthy Center, Second Floor,  
Roshek Building, 700 Locust St.  
Dubuque**

**Call to order:**

Chair Edith Pfeffer called the meeting to order.

Roll call was taken with a quorum of the eight-member 2016 roster present.

Commissioners:

Edith Pfeffer, Chair, Martin Graber, VC.; Jane Regan, Treasurer; Dan Peterson, Secretary

Lisa Walsh, John Goodmann, Jay Schweitzer

Tech Members:

Mary Stahlhut, Iowa DOT Byways Program

Shawna Lode- Travel Iowa, Iowa Economic Development Administration

Randy Schultz, DNR River Fish Hatcheries Manager

Susanne Thiede-Barnet, MRPC National Office (NO)

Roll call reports on annual report distribution:

Graber- Mostly done

Walsh- Planning to schedule after new officials are in office.

Peterson- Harvest is over, will finish soon with new officials

Guests:

Jean Peiton, Ft. Madison

Liesl Voges, DCA Community Development

Penny Vacek from Senator Grassley's office

Matt Closs, Bellevue

**Foundation of Greater Dubuque – MJ Smith, former MRPC commissioner**

Serves eight counties in this immediate area. The Community Foundation movement. Build permanent funds for treasured places. MRPC endowment is held for the national endowment. Financial reports for commissioners. \$1500 payout per year. Clayton County Fracking Study was funded this year, along with other bundled donations. The history of Iowa MRPC and 10-state organization endowment position was to facilitate conversation and engagement on issues, rather than take a strong position is the. Discussion that fracking should not impact the GRR viewshed. "Please don't pile sand" in the viewshed." Five zoning restrictions were enacted. One thousand hours were contributed to the effort.

## **Welcome and Announcements:**

### **Business:**

#### Minutes –

October 12, 2016, meeting minutes as distributed were reviewed by Pfeffer.  
Moved to accept minutes as amended: Graber, Second: Walsh

\*Approved.

#### Treasurer reports

Mary Stahlhut Reported the MRPC 2017 DOT appropriation budget balance at \$29,306.31. Annual dues will be paid when the invoice is received in calendar year 2017. Graber reported that the budget at the state level will be very tight this legislative session.

Motion to accept the MRPC DOT financial report as distributed: Peterson,  
Second: Graber

Discussion: none

\*Approved.

## **Other Reports**

### **Interpretative Center staff updates**

Jenna Pollack- Motor Mill and will present the reports in the new year. Jenna reported the new roofs and other projects underway at Motor Mill.

### **Meeting schedule**

MRPC meeting schedule was proposed and agreed to be December 19, 2016 and February 20,2017

### **National MRPC Committee reports**

There is a wrap-up document on the National Office (NO) website now. NO is requesting fall photos to be shared. National Geographic affiliated geo-tourism web site now has 14,000 subscribers.

**Culture and Heritage:** Commissioner Graber reported that interpretive center visits are very important. Each commissioner should complete their I-center surveys so the annual reporting records will be complete. NO is asking local I-Centers to identify their thematic area so they can tie the information to areas of interest online. Front line and other staff seem to not integrate their status with their business practice, despite efforts to inform and train locals. Discussion followed about what promotional and way-finding signs should focus on directing travelers to each interpretive center. Walsh is interested in having an I-Center in Des Moines County- possibly fish-related. The Leopold Center is in early development.

**Marketing:** No report, However, NO is beginning plans for a 2018 Great Bike Ride on the Great River Road.

**Transportation:** National organization has committees collaborating on having the GIS files. National was asked to use a bid process. No recent meetings or conference calls. In Iowa, the Great River Road signing project continues.

**Agriculture:** No report.  
-2018 Bike Ride on Great River Road

### **Chairwoman's report**

Meeting with Governor Branstad. Regan and Pfeffer met with him 10/21. They provided a report and shared the funding letter sent to DOT for additional funding for the 2017 annual meeting. In 2013, DOT provided additional funding the last time Iowa hosted an annual meeting in 2009. . The Governor suggested that the MRPC approach the riverfront gaming commissions for contributions / sponsorship, suggesting they could draw \$50,000. One recent contribution was \$15,000 for the Lansing interpretive center. MRPC is not a 501C3 so cannot apply directly. The governor's response to the Japanese marketing effort was asking to have Chinese be the immediate priority. Mississippi River Country (MRC) is the tourism sister organization to the MRPC. MRC receives \$250,000 from the US Department of Commerce. National Scenic Byway Foundation Capitol event is December 6<sup>th</sup>. State and national byways are encouraged to advise legislators to attend.

### **Travel Iowa - Shawna-**

Confirmed what co-op advertising is still pending and what is available. \$3500 Midwest Living magazine print ad. \$1,000 You Tube advertising, Sponsored listings \$1800 to promote your listing on Travel Iowa. Discussion of media including billboards. In Google analytics for both the national and state web sites, Iowa region had impact that Commissioner Regan attributed to the billboard ads.

### **\*MRPC Budget planning for 2017**

Discussion of the budget needs for this year and next year's hosting of the MRPC 10-state annual meeting. Pfeffer reported that with the 501 (c) 4 designation of the companion MRPC, Inc. non-profit. The MRPC. Inc. could raise funds to support hosting the annual meeting in Iowa

### **Ex officio member reports**

Mary Stahlhut: Iowa Department of Transportation's signage project update. Most installations are done from Minnesota south into Muscatine County. The punch list will run the full route of the byway and there have been a number of problems with this project. Work will continue in the winter.

### **Break**

## **2017 National MRPC Fall Annual Meeting Planning - Susanne Thiede-Barnet**

**MRPC Annual Meeting Goal:** Provide tools, resources and training for MRPC commissioners to take home and use in their state.

Fall 2017 dates and potential locations were mentioned. Both of the last MRPC 10-state meetings Iowa hosted were in the Quad Cities. Iowa MRPC should determine what location ASAP. Marquette and Clinton casinos are possible locations. The current preference is not include a weekend and the dates Sept 19-21<sup>st</sup> or the following week.

### **Annual Meeting typical schedule and elements discussion:**

-Board of Directors meeting

-Welcome reception the first evening- not required. Discussion of the tone. Host state usually funds/ provides this.

- 8 AM – 5PM business sessions

- Banquet traditionally closed the meeting, but has changed in recent years. Lunch has been the closure the last two years. This has been less formal than the traditional Pilot's banquet.

Effort to have speakers representing the 4 committee task areas.

- Speakers should be vetted: Mayor of Dubuque, Roy Buell; MJ Smith could speak on the Foundation; Terry Goodmann regarding the extensive Bee Branch flood mitigation and trail development in Dubuque.
- An action item for partnering with the Mississippi River Trail (MRT) bike trail may be on the agenda
- Agri-tourism is an element that reflects Iowa's life on the river and commissioners have offered a list of destinations and hosts who receive agriculture tourist travelers regularly..
- Silos and smokestacks- National Parks program of recognition of the region.
- Farmer's market welcome, Hawkeye stages from Decorah.

Suzanne challenged members to think of the time required to travel and board and de-board a bus. Iowa should determine what they want to educate visitors on and what the best assets are to showcase.

Additional discussion included a desire to offer more than a hotel room hospitality suite to welcome MRPC members from other states. Requesting that the host community CVB host the welcome event free was mentioned. Iowa MRPC could solicit cities to respond to an RFP.

\$10,000/ year grants for Iowa fellowships from the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs may be available for future assistance.

**Adjourn for lunch  
Reconvene**

**Call to order:**

Chair Edith Pfeffer called the meeting to order.

Welcome and introductions

Informal meeting with stakeholder legislators

Legislators attending:

- Mark Lofgren, Iowa Senate District 46
- Kristy Hager, Iowa House District 56
- Penny Vacek from Senator Grassley's office
- Charles Isenhardt, Iowa House District 100
- Rita Hart, Iowa Senate District 49
- Chris Brase, Iowa Senate District 46
- Norlin Mommsen, Iowa House District 97
- Joe M. Seng, Iowa Senate District 45

Commissioner Jane Regan presented an overview of MRPC and the current duties and responsibilities defined in the Iowa Great River Road Corridor Management Plan completed in 2015. Documents may be found here: <http://www.iowadot.gov/iowasbyways/IAGRRCMP.html> Commissioner Duties are described on pages 73-75. Other materials provided are part of these minutes.

**MRPC history**

- 10 Commissioners are appointed by the Governor with an expectation of gender and political party balance.
- MRPC began in 1938 with national and presidential attention.
- 1973- A goal for the route was defined for one route alternating east and west sides of the river
- 1985- A sister organization, Mississippi River Country (MRC) was established to promote tourism collaboratively among the ten states.
- MRPC Goals are currently dated through 2018
- Interpretive Plan and Toolkit
- Ten state web site: [www.experiencemississippiriver.com](http://www.experiencemississippiriver.com)
- Iowa Great River road web site is hosted by Travel Iowa at [www.iowagreatriverroad.com](http://www.iowagreatriverroad.com)
- National Geographic Geo-tourism web site <http://mississippiriver.natgeotourism.com/>
- 16 Iowa Interpretive Centers are detailed in our map and tear sheet and on the Iowa GRR web site.
- Iowa MRPC has received an annual appropriation from the Road Use Tax Fund (RUTF) at a level of \$40,000 some time. \$15,000 of that goes to the 10-state MRPC membership

**Iowa Great River Road Corridor Management (CMP) Implementation**

- Includes the need for a new Companion Leadership Team and;
- Funding

Jane reported that the volunteers do all the work and use their own equipment.

Commissioners are expected to do 3-4 days a week working on the MRPC and CMP implementation. Jane provided quotes from the CMP and reported on MRPC Commissioner activities:

- Asking for more money to hire staff.
- Stakeholder wish list is part of the CMP.

- We meet twice a year with the governor. And with senators and representatives in the GRR corridor.
- Travel Federation Event for legislators late January
- Transportation Day event at the capitol
- MRPC requested a grant from NSB for signs - awarded 2012.
- 2015-16 Advertising
- MRC has the GRR app in Japanese – Governor wants it in Chinese.

**Promo- Jane’s presentation dated March 2016**

- Use the GRR logo with permission in your promos
- I-center promo
- There aren’t enough 10-state GRR maps available. 100,000 10-state maps 3500 requests per month for mailing. Need a national sponsor
- Iowa DODT provides the Iowa GRR Tear sheet maps at no cost.
- I-center brochures need updated and a statewide brochure is a goal.
- Economic Development report from Travel Iowa: Jane pulls out the 10 river counties.
  - Visitor dollars spent, transportation etc.
  - Categories
  - Breakdown per capita
  - RUTF increase did not hurt visitor traffic.
  - Hotel/motel/campground
  - Food
  - Retail and entertainment
  - \$1.5 billion on the “east coast” is all about the river
  - Contrast with the next counties west is stark. Tourism dollars are in the eastern counties.
  - Jane also compared her figures to other byways
    - She attributes the revenue directly to the byways
    - Reported on each byway and noted they are supported by an “ RC&D”

Shawna clarified some points because her agency commissioned the tourism economic impact study. (Partnership tools including the study are available on the Travel Iowa web site here: [http://www.traveliowa.com/asp/industry\\_partners.aspx](http://www.traveliowa.com/asp/industry_partners.aspx) )

**Iowa MRPC Fall 2015 GRR radio and earlier billboard efforts were reported.**

- Pushed birding, bike and drive with radio ads
- Jane took credit for the web site traffic change.
- Annual Drive the Great River Road

**GRR**

- Does have excellent Google analytics on Travel Iowa

**Mississippi River Country**

- E-newsletter has grown 23%
- Sessions on the site are up 27%
- 140,000 site users
- Upper Miss. Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois are the top traffic areas.

Edith reported

- A NO push for biking and growth in RV and camping. DNR/ Army Corps promoting camping. New home rental market. VRBO™ Vacation Home Rentals web site and Air B&B have lots of Iowa GRR homes available.

Commissioner Regan concluded, "That's what we are commissioned to do. Hoping we can get some dollars from somewhere for administrative support."

Commission Chair, Pfeffer and Commissioner Regan concluded with an appeal to the legislators present to protect the MRPC budget and requested their input.

Can we meet you in the capitol in January? What would you recommend?

**Legislators' Response:**

Informative and big undertaking. We tend to put dollars where the locals are also contributing to the effort. Bring local leaders with you when you make the pitch.

Edith mentioned the 301 (c0 4 that has been used for fundraising before.

Kristy

How do the other 9 states fund their commissions?

Goodmann responded: MN fully funded by DOT; Missouri- no funds, Wisconsin commissioners are elected and state funded. Arkansas has support from their university system. MN has 3 part timers doing marketing and have legislators on their commission.

What do you hear about the movement for a Driftless Rivers National Park?

Commissioners had not heard of this movement in Iowa.

Edith reported what Governor stated- wanted the MRC web site and materials translated into Chinese and suggested that MRPC solicit \$50,000 from casinos. Rita asked, "Did you make a particular ask of the Governor? Rita suggested getting help from the Governor's office on approaching the casinos..

**Discussion:**

- John countered that our goals to drive people to the interpretive centers is not the same as sending them to casinos.
- 16,000 to the Sawmill from MRC [www.experiencemississippiriver.com](http://www.experiencemississippiriver.com)
- John reported on the CMP visitor and resident surveys

Edith:

- Local economic development along the corridor is key
- 29 legislators represent the Great River Road Counties along the corridor.
- State fair Booth for the Iowa Byways. GRR did 2 days. Plan to again.
- Need new interpretive panels
- Need additional scenic overlooks
- Capture Chinese visitors?
- Appeal made for legislators to look out for the MRPC.

Rita suggested commissioners go to economic development not just transportation committees. Tourism is economic development. Cord Overton? Who with the Governor's office would help?

Mark Lofren asked "How many partnerships do you have up and down the route at the local level? Your basic support should be these people who are directly affected."

**Mississippi River Trail**

MRT funding was lost. Staffer moved to where there was other funding for the Nat-Geo project.

Edith reported MRT process. Discussion of MRT development.

Adjourn Moved John, Second Dan.



**Second meeting- MRPC, Inc.**

Send out the stakeholders' lists to commissioners again. (MARY)

The stakeholder lists are online in the CMP.

Plan to send fund-raising letters out soon. Edith will provide the letter.

December 12, \$\$ for meeting paid from non-profit. Moved Jay and Second Dan

Jay adjourn, second, John

\*Approved