



**Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission
3rd Quarter Meeting – August 19, 2021
Zoom Virtual Meeting
MINUTES – Draft**

Commissioners Present

Karl Samp – Brainerd to Elk River
John Anfinson – Elk River to Hastings
Sen. David Senjem
Sen. Patricia Torres Ray
Rep. Kristin Robbins
Paul Hugunin – Agriculture Appointee
David Kelliher – Historical Society Appointee
Marni Karnowski – Transportation Appointee
Lisa Havelka – Tourism Appointee
Anne Lewis – At Large Member

Technical Advisors/Staff Present

Gina Bonsignore – Natural Resources

Carol Zoff – Transportation
Diane Henry Wangensteen – LCC
Sandy Most - LCC
Chris Miller – MN-MRPC Staff

Members Absent

Sally Fineday – Lake Itasca to Grand Rapids
Megan Christianson – Grand Rapids to Brainerd
Jennifer Weaver – Hastings to Iowa Border
Rep. Emma Greenman
Grant Wilson – Natural Resources Appointee
Craig Hansen – National Park Service
Tim Wilcox – Transportation Technical Advisor

Meeting was called to order at 2:00 p.m. by Chair Senjem. Roll call was taken with the members listed above present. There was a quorum.

Approve Minutes from 5/27/21 Meeting: Motion by Karl Samp and seconded by Anne Lewis to approve the minutes from the May 27, 2021 meeting as presented. Motion carried.

Budget Report: Treasurer Anne Lewis referenced the report in the meeting packet, which provided an overview of the new budget for Fiscal Year 2022. The budget does reflect some in person meetings and travel and will be adjusted as needed based on actual conditions during the year. Discussion followed. Motion by Sen. Torres Ray and seconded by John Anfinson to approve the report as presented. Motion carried.

Regional Meetings/Elections: Chris Miller reported that three regional meetings are due to be held before the end of 2021, including elections of Regional Commissioners. The regions are Lake Itasca to Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids to Brainerd and Brainerd to Elk River. Feedback was requested on the plan to hold these meetings in a virtual format as done in 2020. This approach offers reduced travel time and increased opportunity for partners from throughout the regions to attend. Consensus was to proceed with virtual regional meetings as proposed. Sen. Torres Ray recommended increasing efforts to recruit applicants that reflect the diversity of the state.

MRPC Board & National Meetings: Pilot Anne Lewis announced that the 2021 National MRPC Annual Meeting will be on October 5 and will be virtual with a focus on technical committee work sessions. The implications and responsibilities of the recent All-American Road designation will help guide committee work. The Pilot attended a celebration in Prescott, Wisconsin at the invitation of the Wisconsin MRPC as part of their celebration of the All-American Road designation. Events were held in all eight Wisconsin Great River Road counties. Five-year funding for the National Scenic Byways Program did not make it into the Senate recovery bill but is still in the House version. The Itasca County Historical Society will soon be receiving their official notification from the National Office of their new designation as a National Great River Road Interpretive Center.

Drive the Great River Road Month: Chris Miller reported on plans for annual Drive the Great River Road Month (September). The theme will be continued celebration of the All-American Road designation and will use this to encourage Great River Road travel and raise awareness. Information will be sent to the MN-MRPC's media list and marketing/distribution partners along the Great River Road; there will be a fall online article in River Travel Magazine, the new All-American Favorites page will be available on the Minnesota Great River Road website; Facebook posts will highlight the celebration throughout the month and promote the National Great River Road sweepstakes; and a proclamation has been requested from the Governor's Office. MN-MRPC members were asked to help spread the word – information will be provided by the end of August. A suggestion was made to consider a Farmers Market/Harvest theme for the 2022 promotion.

MRPC Marketing Committee: Lisa Havelka reported that the committee has been prioritizing new projects and approaches based on the All-American Road designation. Plans to develop a series of themed itineraries are beginning to emerge, along with alignment of efforts with State Tourism Offices to tell the stories and leverage resources.

MRPC Culture & Heritage Committee: John Anfinson shared information on the committee's efforts to define expectations for Interpretive Centers and provide outreach and support to them. Future nominations will likely be held to a higher standard in keeping with the All-American Road designation.

MRPC Environment, Recreation & Agriculture Committee: Anne Lewis noted that the Committee Chair has been working with partner organizations looking into options for a pollinator habitat project. Marni Karnowski looks forward to the next committee meeting and welcomes the opportunity to be involved. Gina Bonsignore offered assistance if pollinator projects proceed.

MRPC Transportation Committee: No committee report at this time.

Plan Your Trip Interactive Map Updates: Carol Zoff introduced Jack Flom, MnDOT student worker, who provided details on Plan Your Trip. Jack reviewed the updates that have been made to the traveler resources database. Unnecessary data has been removed from each listing to facilitate future maintenance, contact information and links are being checked, the newest Interpretive Center (Itasca County Historical Society) has been added, and cultural sites have been added. The Minnesota Grown sites in the map have been updated to reflect the most current membership list from the MN Department of Agriculture. Discussion followed. Marni Karnowski asked about how the data will be maintained/updated over time. The answer varies by type of data. Minnesota Grown listings will be updated annually when their member data is updated and provided to MnDOT. An app interface form is being developed to collect updates/edits from individual sites. The form will be used with state agency partners and the Ambassador Program to help keep data current. Many of the sites are DNR locations. Gina Bonsignore suggested including Plan Your Trip on the agenda when groups of related DNR staff are meeting and offered to help develop strategies for the list of DNR sites included in Plan Your Trip. Karl Samp suggested creating postcards or business card-style handouts that our partners could use to lead people to the website and Plan Your Trip online tool. The style could be similar that of the cards used during the Corridor Management Plan process. This suggestion will be considered during the year if the budget allows.

MN GRR Website: Chris Miller reported on and demonstrated new pages (All-American Road and Ambassador Program) and overall edits on the Minnesota Great River Road website. The All-American Favorites page, still in draft form, was also reviewed and discussed. The page will contain content submitted by MN-MRPC members, partners and the public and is intended to showcase personal favorites along the route all of which make the Great River Road an All-American Road. There was discussion on the launch timing and process. Consensus was to launch the favorites page prior to Drive the Great River Road Month and feature it during the month. Thanks were noted to Jennifer Weaver and John Anfinson for providing the initial sample content for the favorites page, and to the website project team of Lisa Havelka, Megan Christianson, and Carol Zoff.

Ambassador Program: A new landing page of information about the program is now available on the MN Great River Road website. A resource section will be added so ambassadors can access information on various topics as needed. The program will be rolling out this fall beginning with Interpretive Centers. Thanks were noted to Jennifer Weaver for her help reviewing the content and providing program suggestions. An orientation presentation for Centers will include an overview of the Minnesota and National Great River Road; information on free promotional tools available; gathering of feedback and details on things happening at local sites to use for improved promotion; and completion of the Annual Interpretive Center Checklist provided by the National MRPC. After Interpretive Center outreach is completed, the feedback will be reviewed, and orientation content modified. Then Community Tourism Offices will be engaged. Sessions will also be planned for MN-MRPC members later in the year. There was discussion about the landing webpage and a recommendation made to remove some of the sections to clarify who the program is for, especially in the early rollout phase. Minnesota Grown members were suggested as a future audience for the program – members could be recruited to participate and would be a local expert for the Great River Road. Signage and business cards could be used to guide customers to Plan Your Trip; etc. A suggestion was made to record the orientation sessions for use as the program expands, possibly with a live Q & A session available.

Improving Access and Welcoming Environment along the Mississippi River: A presentation introducing the MN-MRPC and Great River Road was made to the Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs in June. Feedback and suggestions were received. The next step is the survey of MN-MRPC member agencies to gather information on their outreach and

engagement initiatives, followed by another meeting of the work group to begin developing recommendations for the Commission. David Kelliher suggested that questions be emailed out to agency representatives first, followed up with phone conversations as appropriate. It was also suggested that the MN-MRPC/LCC reach back out to the ethnic councils who have not yet scheduled a presentation. As applications are sought for Regional Commissioner positions this fall, details and invitations will be sent to all ethnic councils with a request to share the information and encourage applications.

Interpretive Panel Condition Review: Carol Zoff and Jack Flom reported about a new map developed to show the locations of all MN Great River Road Interpretive Panels currently in existence. This includes the seven Mississippi River Trail kiosks installed as part of the Corridor Management Plan (CMP) project. The CMP includes a strategy to evaluate/replace existing interpretive panels and finish/install the panels remaining in the Interpretive Plan. This would result in panels placed in all MN Great River Road counties. A condition analysis of the existing panels is being completed which will lead to an estimate of cost for necessary updates, repairs, and replacements. This would be in preparation for any potential funding opportunities – for either repair/replacement or new installations. The CMP also included a recommendation to improve and expand the telling of Native American stories along the Great River Road. Review of existing story content and development of new content could also be included in a future project funding application.

EDA Travel, Tourism & Outdoor Recreation Grants: Anne Lewis provided an overview of current grant opportunities through the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration. Handouts in the packet were referenced. There are two categories – Competitive Grants and State Grants. Details are being determined on how a potential State Grant would be handled in Minnesota and whether funds would be sub-granted within the state. Lisa Havelka noted that although the funding does address travel and tourism, the Department of Employment and Economic Development might be best positioned to handle the program. Explore Minnesota does not manage grants for brick-and-mortar projects (which seem to have significant mention in this program) but could be involved with tourism marketing. It was also advised to contact the EDA office in Chicago for program details and opinions/guidance on possible projects. After additional discussion, John Anfinson suggested an ad hoc committee to meet soon and evaluate both categories of the grant program and possible projects. Potential committee members included Anfinson, Karnowski, Havelka, Zoff, Wilcox, Senjem, Lewis, Samp, Kelliher. Staff will reach out to schedule a meeting within the next two weeks and results will be shared with Commission members.

St. Anthony Falls Cutoff Wall: John Anfinson noted the recent Minneapolis Star Tribune article that gave an overview of the St. Anthony Falls Cutoff Wall history and status. He provided information for the story. He also reported on his conversations with elected officials' staff regarding determining ownership of the wall and responsibility for maintenance. The Corps of Engineers will be convening a group of stakeholders soon to discuss the wall. Updates will be shared with the MN-MRPC as available, and Anfinson as Metro Regional Commissioner will continue to monitor developments.

Commission Member Updates: Written updates from the DNR and Minnesota Historical Society were included in the meeting packet. Karl Samp provided a report from the Brainerd to Elk River Region – the Brainerd Mississippi Riverfront Trailhead Park Project had \$2.8 million in funding approved by the Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR). Another \$1 million is needed to complete the project. Thanks were expressed to all who have supported this project. The Mississippi Headwaters Board's river signage/resource retention plans continue to take shape, and successful local river paddling events have been held in several communities. Crow Wing State Park has requested MN Great River Road Maps. The Cuyuna Mountain Bike Trail expansion continues along with related business growth in the area. An American Queen/Shore Excursions trip to Itasca State Park will be coming up soon, with Samp serving as a step on guide.

Other Business and Discussion: Sen. Senjem suggested sharing the MN-MRPC's 2020-21 Annual Report with related House and Senate Committees, with a cover letter from MN-MRPC legislative members. Sen. Torres Ray and Rep. Robbins agreed. Sen. Senjem also asked the group to consider other possible recipients for the report, as an opportunity to share information about the work of the Commission.

Next Meeting: November 18, 2:00 – 4:30 p.m.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 p.m.