



**Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission
3rd Quarter Meeting – August 17, 2023
Capitol/Zoom Hybrid
MINUTES – Draft**

Commissioners Present

Sally Fineday – Lake Itasca to Grand Rapids
Megan Christianson – Grand Rapids to Brainerd
Karl Samp – Brainerd to Elk River
John Anfinson – Elk River to Hastings
Kate Carlson – Hastings to Iowa Border
Sen. John Hoffman
Rep. Leigh Finke
Paul Hugunin – Agriculture Appointee
Lisa Havelka – Tourism Appointee
Marni Karnowski – Transportation Appointee
Anne Lewis – At Large Member

Technical Advisors/Staff Present

Kelli Bruns – Natural Resources

Carol Zoff – Transportation
Peter MacDonagh - Transportation
Diane Henry Wangenstein – LCC
Megan Voelke - LCC
Chris Miller – MN-MRPC Staff

Members Absent

Sen. Karin Housley
Rep. Sydney Jordan
David Kelliher – Historical Society Appointee
Grant Wilson – Natural Resources Appointee
Tucker Blythe – National Park Service

Guest Present

David Senjem, Past MN-MRPC Chair

The meeting was called to order at 2:05 p.m. by Vice Chair Anfinson, followed by introductions. A quorum was present. Marni Karnowski of MnDOT was welcomed back to the Commission after serving in a temporary assignment.

Approve Agenda and Minutes from 6/1/22 Meeting: Motion by Anne Lewis and seconded by Paul Hugunin to approve the draft agenda and June 1, 2023 meeting minutes as presented. Motion carried with a roll call vote noting all present voting in favor.

Budget Report: The draft fiscal year 2024 activity budget (July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024) in the meeting packet was referenced by Anne Lewis and Chris Miller. Motion by John Anfinson and seconded by Sally Fineday to approve the budget as presented. Motion carried.

Authorize Chair to Sign MN-MRPC Contracts: Motion by Marni Karnowski and seconded by Sally Fineday to authorize the MN-MRPC Chair, currently Sen. Housley, to negotiate and execute contracts on behalf of the Commission with concurrence of the Executive Director of the Legislative Coordinating Commission as fiscal agent for the Commission, and in keeping with approved Commission budgets. Motion carried.

MRPC 2023 Annual Meeting: The Annual Meeting is planned for September 20 – 22 in Alton/Collinsville, Illinois. John Anfinson and Anne Lewis will be attending in their National MRPC leadership roles, and the MN-MRPC has approval to send Sen. Housley, Sen. Hoffman, and Sally Fineday. Peter MacDonagh of MnDOT also plans to attend. John announced that Minnesota Grown/Minnesota Department of Agriculture will be receiving a National MRPC Stewardship Award for their sponsorship and leadership of the 2022 Fall Harvest promotion for Drive the Great River Road Month. There was discussion about the process for a representative to attend and accept the award. Chris Miller noted that for the state reports portion of the agenda, each state will be asked to share 1 – 2 success stories, in keeping with the overall theme of the meeting. Chris will work with the Minnesota team of attendees on this report and is also available to help with questions on registration and travel reimbursement.

MRPC Communications and Marketing Committee: The committee has not met since the last MN-MRPC meeting.

MRPC Culture and Heritage Committee: John Anfinson reported that the committee is working on review of two new Great River Road Interpretive Center nominations and gathering information on which Interpretive Centers have pollinator gardens/habitat on their grounds. There is interest in developing a podcast or promotion of some sort for Interpretive Centers and the committee is looking for innovative ways to tell the stories of Interpretive Centers. Suggestions can be forwarded to John Anfinson or Anne Lewis.

MRPC Environment, Recreation and Agriculture Committee: Anne Lewis reported that the most recent meeting focused on pollinator efforts including a possible partnership with Rotary. Others were asked for feedback on things happening in Minnesota. Carol Zoff mentioned that MnDOT has set a goal of 75% native plant pollinator seeding for construction projects, and additional goals within the Office of Environmental Stewardship. They are also working with the Department of Agriculture Nursery Task Force to encourage Minnesota growers of seed. In Minnesota, 40% of the Great River Road is on the state trunk highway system. Information sharing among DOTs from Great River Road states would be helpful. Marni Karnowski mentioned the Nationwide Monarch Conservation Agreement and Highways for Habitat funding. John Anfinson noted that some states have CRP program requirements for pollinator habitat and asked about status in Minnesota. Paul Hugunin offered to check into it. There was also discussion about the PCA's AmeriCorps/Green Corps Program as a possible partnership, with potential projects such as development of a podcast on pollinators for Interpretive Centers.

MRPC Transportation Committee: Peter MacDonagh reported on discussions from the July meeting including EV charging stations along the Great River Road and possible adoption of the EPA information and guide; and a presentation on signage and step-by-step directions to Interpretive Centers by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation.

Interpretive Center Visits - Report: John Anfinson visited Great River Road Interpretive Centers north of the Twin Cities in July. He mentioned the importance of in-person visits and provided summaries of the visits to the Oliver Kelley Farm, Charles Lindbergh House and Museum, Forest History Center, Itasca County Historical Society, and Itasca State Park. John also met with the Itasca County Historical Society Board and will be speaking at an upcoming event for them. Paul Hugunin suggested the Oliver Kelley Farm as a location for a future MN-MRPC meeting, as an opportunity for all members to visit an Interpretive Center as was done at Historic Fort Snelling in November 2022. Sally Fineday mentioned a past visit to Itasca State Park and plans to visit again.

MN Great River Road Ambassador Program: Chris Miller provided an update on recent activities including two Ambassador Orientations via Zoom for MN-MRPC members in July, and a session provided in August for Community Tourism Offices as a launch for the Drive the Great River Road Month arts theme. Feedback received from these sessions will be used to plan future offerings, including orientation sessions once or twice per year for new staff at Convention and Visitors Bureaus/Chambers and other partner organizations.

Drive the Great River Road Month 2023: September marks the annual celebration of Drive the Great River Road month and a summary of plans for the Minnesota Great River Road was referenced in the meeting packet. The 2023 theme focuses on the arts in MN Great River Road communities. A webpage has been developed using content provided by community partners. The content will also be featured on Facebook throughout September. All MN-MRPC members were asked for help getting the word out. Kate Carlson noted that a kick-off event is being held at the Minnesota Marine Art Museum on August 31 and mentioned the helpfulness of having a theme like this to promote locally. Megan Christianson reported on how Visit Grand Rapids promoted Drive the Great River Road Month last year and plans for this year including a sweepstakes connected to Drive Month.

Northland Reliability Electric Transmission Project: Marni Karnowski provided an overview of the Northland Reliability Transmission Project, which could impact the Great River Road with proposed crossings of the Great River Road at Itasca County Road 3 and Crow Wing County Road 11. Discussion followed. It was noted that the mission of the MN-MRPC and National Scenic Byway Intrinsic Qualities are often the base for Commission comments; comment periods provide an opportunity for the Commission; agency members including the DNR may be submitting comments on their own; feedback from Regional Commissioners is important because they know the areas best; it would be helpful to see scale references with the proposed new tower diagrams.

Members suggested that the next step be a briefing for the Regional Commissioners in the area and requested their recommendations on comments for consideration by the full MN-MRPC at a future meeting. The DNR will also likely be providing comments and offered to share information with the Regional Commissioners as part of the briefing.

What's Next for the MN-MRPC? Priorities Review & Discussion: John Anfinson provided an overview of current and potential priorities referencing material provided in the meeting packet and the Corridor Management Plan (CMP). Questions to consider include – What's required of us? What provides the greatest return? What provides the greatest rewards? Status of the four initial implementation priorities from the CMP was reviewed. 1) Wayfinding signage has been completely re-done and is now in a maintenance phase (which requires ongoing attention); 2) Ambassador Program has been implemented with defined groups and is an ongoing process; 3) Plan Your Trip Interactive Mapping was

implemented and continues to be offered for travelers, updating is needed along with overall maintenance/hosting of the system; and 4) Plan Your Project approach has evolved and much of the information is available within Plan Your Trip.

Preliminary discussion followed on priorities and available resources/participation.

- Carol Zoff noted that MnDOT will continue with Plan Your Project though it might function under the umbrella of Plan Your Trip rather than as a separate online tool.
- Plan Your Trip will need updating of the 700+ things to see and do. This could potentially be an MNIT project for an electronic update system and MnDOT is looking to review options in early 2024 – staff time is needed along with time of MN-MRPC members and partners. The goal is to develop an automated update system to function long term. Plan Your Trip is the primary information tool for MN Great River Road travelers and should remain a priority.
- Drive the Great River Road month partnerships and theme should continue.
- Roadside Storybook is currently on the list of possibilities but funding and a lead agency to manage the project would be needed. A team met last year to recommend next steps and defined a two-part process – review and revision/updating of content, and then fabrication and installation of interpretive panels at partner sites. MnDOT could potentially offer help later in the process with construction contracts, etc. depending on availability of staff time and resources.

Priorities discussion was referred to the Executive Committee for further review. A suggestion was made to develop a poll that would allow members to rank priorities.

Member & Guest Updates

- Sen. Hoffman noted that the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative (MRCTI) Annual Meeting will be in Bemidji in September. He will be in attendance and is looking for ways to partner with this group such as through a Mississippi River Compact. Dave Senjem mentioned the Mississippi River Caucus under the umbrella of the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators, and Anne Lewis followed up noting that this group received a Stewardship Award last year from the National MRPC.
- Sally Fineday will also be attending the MRCTI meeting.
- John Anfinson will be the featured speaker on a 1 Mississippi online event on September 26 (The Long Journey of the Great River).
- Dave Senjem mentioned the topic of EV charging stations and the importance of having enough of them available and publicized along the Great River Road.
- Marni Karnowski reported that MnDOT has submitted comments on the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Travel and Tourism Strategic Plan and supported inclusion of National Scenic Byways in that plan. Marni also reported that she plans to resume her position on the MRPC Environment, Recreation and Agriculture Committee.

Next Meeting

November 16, 2023, 2:00 – 4:30 p.m.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:20 p.m.