



Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission
1st Quarter Meeting – February 21, 2025
Capitol Room G15/Zoom Hybrid
MINUTES – Draft

Commissioners Present

Megan Christianson – Grand Rapids to Brainerd
Karl Samp – Brainerd to Elk River
John Anfinson – Elk River to Hastings
Kate Carlson – Hastings to Iowa Border
David Kelliher – Historical Society
Grant Wilson – Natural Resources
Marni Karnowski – Transportation
Anne Lewis – At Large

Technical Advisors/Staff Present

Amanda Dirnberger – Natural Resources
Peter MacDonagh - Transportation
Carol Zoff – Transportation
Diane Henry-Wangenstein – LCC

Megan Voelke - LCC
Chris Miller – MN-MRPC Staff

Members & Technical Advisors Absent

Sally Fineday – Lake Itasca to Grand Rapids
Sen. Karin Housley
Sen. John Hoffman
Rep. Huldah Momanyi-Hiltsley
Paul Hugunin – Agriculture
Lisa Havelka – Explore Minnesota
Tucker Blythe – National Park Service

Partners/Guests Present

Tim Wilcox, MnDOT

The meeting was called to order for general information updates at 2:05 p.m. by MN-MRPC Vice Chair, John Anfinson, followed by introductions. A quorum was present at 2:20 p.m. and the Commission proceeded with routine business items at that time. Other Commission action will be tabled until a full roster is in place. The meeting packet and recording are available at <https://www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/mrpc/>.

Approve Agenda and Minutes from 11/21/24 Meeting: The agenda and minutes were reviewed, and a vote was taken upon arrival of a quorum. Motion by Anne Lewis and seconded by David Kelliher to approve the draft agenda and November 21, 2024 meeting minutes as presented. Motion carried. Carol Zoff called attention to the recognition of former Minnesota Scenic Byways Coordinator Holly Slagle, and shared Holly's appreciation of the letter sent by the Commission in honor of her retirement and service to Minnesota Byways.

Budget Report: Secretary-Treasurer Anne Lewis referenced the year-to-date budget report in the meeting packet and called attention to the notes. Chris Miller provided additional details. A map reprint project is being pursued due to funds remaining after the 2024 Annual Meeting, less than anticipated travel for quarterly meetings, and carry-over from FY 24 being placed in the printing line item in anticipation of need for maps. More discussion on this will take place later in the agenda.

Regional Meetings/Elections: Terms for Regional Commissioners in Headwaters/Northwoods, Crossings and Scenic Regions end on December 31, 2025. Regional Meetings/elections will need to be scheduled prior to the November 21 MN-MRPC meeting. The recent change in statute to staggered four-year terms also clarified the process in that regional committees make recommendations back to the MN-MRPC, and the MN-MRPC then appoints the member. Terms for Metro and Bluffs regions are scheduled to end on December 31, 2027 and so regional meetings will be needed in the fall of 2027. MN-MRPC officer elections generally take place every two years and, following that pattern, would be due at the May 2025 Quarterly Meeting. Chris Miller requested feedback on format for regional meetings – in-person or Zoom. Responses indicated a preference for hybrid meetings if possible. Suggested timeframe was October – November since September includes the MRPC Annual Meeting and is also Drive the Great River Road Month.

MRPC Board: John Anfinson reported that the 2025 Annual Meeting is tentatively planned for Louisiana, September 10 – 12 but is still being confirmed. The 2025 Annual Meeting of the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative (MRCTI) will be September 16 – 18 in the Twin Cities. John also noted the recent passing of Rep. Martin Graber, Chair of the Iowa MRPC, who will be greatly missed.

MRPC Communications & Marketing Committee: Kate Carlson reported that the committee's recent meeting focused on discussion related to the upcoming America 250 celebration and ways the Great River Road could connect with this effort. Ideas included developing and promoting a list of 250 things to do along the Great River Road. Minnesota could start thinking about content/storytelling that might be a fit. The quarterly Great River Road marketing report is available at www.mrpcmembers.com.

MRPC Culture & Heritage Committee: David Kelliher shared information on America 250 activities in Minnesota, in follow up to the Communications & Marketing Committee discussion. The Culture and Heritage Committee has also discussed how the Great River Road could play a part in the celebration. Each state has a committee. MNHS is providing administrative support for the Governor's America 250 Minnesota Committee. Anne Lewis suggested reaching out to the committee to indicate interest in participating as a primary partner for Mississippi River content, since the Mississippi River is central to the history of the nation. Anne offered to draft a letter of interest and David volunteered to help with the MN-MRPC connect with the committee. John Anfinson shared information on a project to inventory and develop wayfinding signage to Interpretive Centers, led by the Transportation Committee. Reporting documents are available on the MRPC members website. The Culture & Heritage Committee is also working on a virtual meeting for Interpretive Centers in May.

MRPC Environment, Recreation & Agriculture: Marni Karnowski reported that there has not been a recent committee meeting, more to come after the next meeting.

MRPC Transportation: Peter MacDonagh reported on progress to date on the Interpretive Center signage project. Turnout at recent committee meetings has been low recently and most states have yet to complete the signage form. It will be a significant project for Minnesota, since there are 13 Interpretive Centers. More discussion is needed to determine how best to move forward. Peter also noted that the MRPC continues to pursue the trademark and logo rights for the Mississippi River Trail (MRT), with movement on that expected soon due to expiration of the trademark ownership in March.

MN Great River Road Information Tools: An ad hoc committee was convened as requested at the last MN-MRPC quarterly meeting. Recommendations and next steps were included in the meeting packet, with the main points being 1) proceeding with a reprint and shipping of the MN Great River Road map using funds currently available in the budget with project completion by June; 2) proceeding with a basic rebuild of Plan Your Trip with a goal of launch in early fall, but no later than December (thank you to MnDOT!); 3) removal of Story Maps from the MN GRR website after discussion of the full MN-MRPC. The Story Map content would be retained for possible future use, and 4) Develop a cycle for review of different areas of the MN Great River Road website over time. Another committee meeting will be scheduled after today's discussion by the full MN-MRPC.

Marni Karnowski shared additional background on the Plan Your Trip rebuild. Discussions have taken place within MnDOT and the go ahead has been given for the project. Andrew Kurth in the Office of Environmental Stewardship will be handling the rebuild with a goal of completion prior to Drive the Great River Road Month (September). A kick-off or relaunch could then coincide with the Drive Month campaign. Chris shared the MN Great River Road website on screen, noting which content is part of the site managed through the MN-MRPC and where Plan Your Trip and the Story Maps are included, with links going to MnDOT.

Discussion –

- Members confirmed the need for print maps and the plan to move forward with a print run this spring.

- If possible, Story Map content should be held somewhere for future review and use either of portions of content/photos or a full rebuild.
- Keep the regional section on the MN Great River Road homepage. One suggestion was to link to photos from the regions.
- MN Great River Road videos could potentially still be used as links for the regions. Though the videos are old, much of the information is still correct.
- Keep the regional Story Maps up for now and take them down when Plan Your Trip is ready for relaunch, that way everything would be new at the same time.

Letter of Support Requests: The Commission reviewed two letter of support requests received since the last quarterly meeting.

The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe is seeking National Scenic Byway funds for a road rehabilitation project in partnership with Cass County and Beltrami County. Sen. Housley provided a letter indicating receipt of the request and noting plans for review at the next meeting of the MN-MRPC. Since the Commission is currently awaiting additional appointments, action will be tabled until the next meeting when a full roster is in place.

Three Rivers Park District is seeking RAISE grant funds for the Mississippi River Trail Expansion project. The MN-MRPC reviewed this project and authorized a letter of support for application to another funding source in 2022. Chair Housley provided an updated letter of support for this new funding application, under authority documented by the MN-MRPC in 2024 for previously approved projects. No further action is required at this time.

Commission Member Updates:

- Lisa Havelka was unable to attend today but provided a link to the German interview that John Anfinson recently did about the Mississippi River/Great River Road - <https://audiotravels.podbean.com/e/audiotravels-am-mississippi-entlang-durch-minnesota/>, and thanked John for his efforts on this. Members were encouraged to take a listen.
- John Anfinson mentioned his involvement in an upcoming Minnesota Unraveled podcast through the Minnesota Historical Society.
- Grant Wilson reported on EPA grants now open for application through the DNR, and one-time investments underway as part of the Get out MORE initiative, including boating access sites and fisheries. He also noted upcoming meetings of the Upper Mississippi Basin Association (virtual quarterly meeting on February 25) and Upper Mississippi River Conservation Committee (80th Annual Meeting, March 18-20 in La Crosse).
- David Kelliher shared an update on a proposed new residential development adjacent to the Oliver Kelley Farm. MNHS continues to watch for possible impacts on the Kelley Farm and staff have attended recent planning meetings. The DNR is also doing a review related to the Mississippi River. A park is also part of the planned development.

Next Meeting: May 29, 2025, 2:00 – 4:30 p.m.

Adjournment: There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:35 p.m.