



MRPC



2025

State Priorities in the Meramec Region

An Issues Report For the Region's Legislative Delegation

Members of the Meramec Region's Legislative Delegation

The Meramec Regional Planning Commission, representing eight counties and their respective cities, is pleased to present its 2025 State Priorities agenda to you.

We thank you, our legislators, for your efforts on our behalf. We appreciate the time you take with our organization to discuss local issues, the need for new legislation, the status and impact of pending legislation as well as grants, and other issues of concern to both individual local governments and to MRPC.

As always, we welcome you to attend any of our commission meetings, typically held at 7:30 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month (no meeting in July.) By working together, we can find solutions to the issues facing the Meramec Region and better serve the residents who call it home.

Through the attached report, MRPC wishes to make you—our representatives and senators—aware of our position on a variety of issues and seek your consideration of them.

MRPC, like other RPCs across the state, stand ready to help our cities and counties work in partnership with the state on a variety of projects.

This report is divided into three sections: The first section details our State Priorities and presents our position on various issues. The second section highlights MRPC's achievements this past year; and the last section is demographic and statistical information on our region.

We look forward to working with you in 2025. By working together, we can make the Meramec Region and the state of Missouri an even better place to live and work.

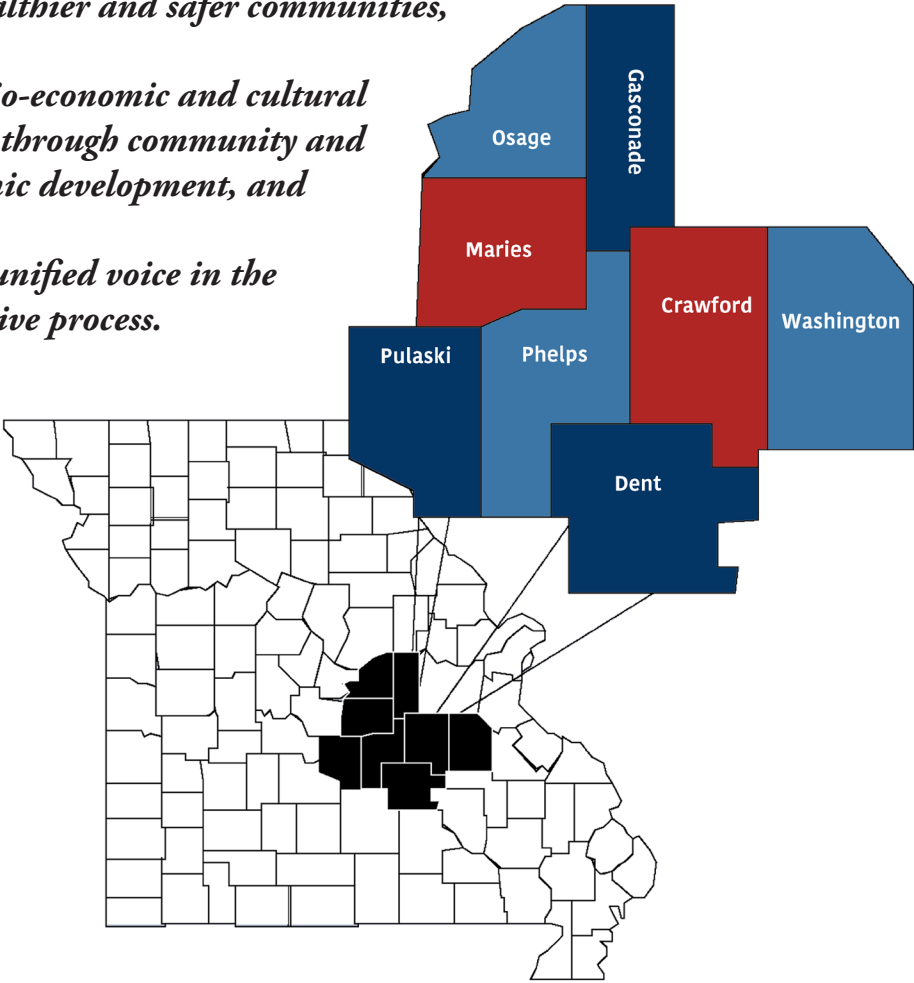
Sincerely,

Bonnie Prigge
MRPC Executive Director

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.

2025 STATE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES IN THE MERAMEC REGION

As the 2025 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 50 and 63.
2. Increase I-44 to 3 lanes east and westbound from St. Louis to Joplin, with six-laning of I-44 from OK to Franklin County. Any disruption in normal traffic flow cause major expenses to county and road maintenance. Accidents involving hazardous materials result in additional costs to county health departments.
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. Establish incentives to encourage housing development as well as encourage policies that promote affordable housing projects in rural areas.
2. Support legislation that would raise the cap on state aid to RPCs to \$50,000 per year, subject to state appropriation. (HB826, HB837, SB477 & SB240)
3. Advocate for incentives (tax breaks or grants) for small businesses and startups in rural areas to stimulate local economies.
4. Fully support Fort Leonard Wood and recognize that it is an economic development engine for Missouri.

ENVIRONMENTAL:

1. Re-instate and extend the sunset on the collection of Tier II fees on hazardous materials to support the MERC and LEPC/LEPDs. The legislation that authorizes the collection of fees from facilities that store hazardous materials sunset in 2024. These funds support the planning and training activities of the Missouri Emergency Response Commission and the local emergency planning committees and districts throughout the state. The law was originally passed in the 1980s and needs to be updated to meet the changing needs of hazardous materials emergency management. We recommend the following changes:
 - A) Eliminate the \$1 million cap on funds that can be held by the MERC;
 - B) Increase the fees collected to cover the increased costs of planning and training for hazmat incidents.The current fee structure charges Casey's the same as Monsanto. Introduce a tiered system that charges convenience stores a lower rate than large facilities that require far more planning and response if an incident occurs. The MERC is currently grossly understaffed for the level of work and responsibility required for state-

wide hazardous materials emergency planning, training and administration of LEPCs/LEPDs. The staffing formula does not consider the federal training funds that are administered by this agency each year. (HB770, HB70, SB564 & SB143)

2. Advocate for funding to improve aging water and wastewater treatment facilities in rural communities.
3. Provide general revenue funds to support the MERC and LEPD activities until the fee that supports the effort is re-instated.

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 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.
4. Restore funding to the Department of Mental Health, Division of Developmental Disabilities budget in order to eliminate the waitlist for those individuals with developmental disabilities receiving waivers for services.

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, physical education and driver's education in secondary education.
3. Support programs and incentives to retain and attract teachers in rural schools (housing stipends and salary increases.)

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (CITY/COUNTY):

1. 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.
2. Cities [and counties] rely upon sales tax as their largest, non-utility revenue provider supporting the many services and amenities on behalf of citizens. Oppose any legislation that would erode the taxing authority of municipalities or remove existing taxing revenues from municipalities.
3. Maintain absentee balloting, but eliminate the mail-in ballot process.

GENERAL:

1. Support the development of 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 the development of legislation that streamlines permitting, promotes cost effective regulatory policies and encourages utilizing the Nuclear Engineering programs in the University of Missouri system and other opportunities to develop recommendations for locating new generating facilities and forward-looking improvements to the grid. Utilizing the University system as one option could open opportunities for Federal funding to help offset the cost and expedite the program.
3. Support adoption and ways to streamline and expedite the adoption process and reduce financial costs to adopting families.

Highlights of 2024 Accomplishments

MRPC's Impact

The Meramec Regional Planning Commission had a strong year in 2023-24. 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.

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 also worked with the planning organizations to establish multimodal transportation advisory committees that discuss transit, bike and pedestrian, rail, airports and port needs separate from road and bridge projects.

MRPC's Transportation Advisory Committee held six meetings in 2023-24. The group continued to stress the importance of the region's top two transportation priorities—Highways 50 and 63 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 Highway 21/47 immediately in front of Kingston K-14 Schools in Washington 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 - Newburg (street reconstruction), Washington County/Mineral Point (bridge replacement), Irondale (street reconstruction), Potosi (bridge replacement) and Meta (culvert/drainage improvements). MRPC secured grants totaling \$1,790,287 to advance these local transportation projects.

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 2023-24, \$4.1 million in federal and state grant monies flowed through the planning and development department for community and economic development projects. In FY 2023-24, staff assisted member communities with the following funding opportunities:

- US Department of Transportation's Safe Streets & Roads for All (SS4A) for MRPC to create a new action

- plan for the region (Funded);
- Delta Regional Authority’s (DRA) Community Infrastructure Fund (CIF) for the city of Potosi to replace 6,000 feet of natural gas pipeline (Not Funded);
 - DRA’s Strategic Planning Grant 2023 for the city of Rolla to update the 2005 Comprehensive Plan (Funded);
 - Missouri Department of Public Safety’s (DPS) Local Violent Crime Prevention Grant (LVCP) for the Dixon Police Department and the city of Dixon to purchase three portable radios with access to the MO-SWIN system (Pending);
 - Missouri Department of Transportation’s (MoDOT) Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) for the city of Owensville to upgrade and establish a sidewalk connection from the Rock Island Trail to the Scenic Regional Library (Not Funded);
 - MoDOT’s TAP for the city of Hermann to replace sidewalks on both sides of 4th Street from Gutenberg Street to Schiller Street with parking lot improvements (Funded);
 - MoDOT’s TAP for the city of Potosi to replace sidewalks on the north side of Citadel Dr., from Luther to Mill St. and the west side of Mill St. between Citadel Dr. and Jefferson St. and on the southwest side of Jefferson St. from Mill St. (Funded);
 - Clif Family Foundation’s Operational Support Grant for Meramec Community Enhancement Corporation (MCEC) to continue Naturally Meramec with marketing/promotion activities and food hub development (Not Funded);
 - Economic Development Authority’s (EDA) Recompete Pilot Program for MRPC to complete a Recompete Strategy Development Plan addressing prime-age employment gap in six counties (Not Funded);
 - Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and National Parks Service’s (NPS) Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) for Meta to create the Meta Elementary Memorial Park, which will include a loop walking trail, benches, parking lot and a basketball/pickleball court (Pending);
 - Missouri DPS’s State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program (SLCGP) for MRPC to do a cyber risk assessment and cybersecurity strategy development for MRPC (Funded);
 - Missouri 911 Service Board’s ARPA 2023 NG911 Funding Cycle for Phelps County Central Dispatch to establish an ESINET with Phelps, Crawford, Maries and Pulaski 911 (Funded);
 - Missouri DPS’s First Responder Equipment Grant for the St. James Ambulance District to purchase a new Type-II Ambulance (Not Funded);
 - Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation’s Community Economic Adjustment Assistance for Military Installation Resilience for MRPC to complete a Military Installation Resiliency Review and Housing Study for Fort Leonard Wood (Funded);
 - DNR’s Missouri State Parks’ Recreational Trails Program for the city of Crocker to resurface an existing walking trail in the city park, as well as adding two new electric poles and three new LED light fixtures (Not Funded);
 - Coover Foundation’s Coover Regional Vibrant Communities Grantmaking Program for CASA of South Central Missouri to increase the number of CASA volunteers serving youth in the foster care system (Pending);
 - DRA’s Strategic Planning Grant for MRPC to update the 2004 Comprehensive Plan (Pending);
 - MoDOT’s Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) program for MRPC to support engineering design, environmental assessment and benefit-cost analysis along the Rock Island Trail State Park and connectors (Funded);

- AARP’s Community Challenge Grant for Leasburg Senior Citizen Homes, Inc. to install 17 new solar/LED light poles around the senior apartment complex (Pending);
- FEMA’s Assistance to Firefighters Grant for the St. James Ambulance District to purchase a replacement Type 1 Ambulance (Pending);
- Missouri DNR’s Lead Service Line Inventory Grant for the city of Gasconade to contract an engineering firm to complete an inventory of the city’s public water lines (Pending);
- MoDOT’s TAP for the city of Owensville for upgrades and establishing a sidewalk connection from Rock Island Trail to the Scenic Regional Library (Funded);
- MoDOT’s TAP for the city of Belle to create a sidewalk along First Street from the Rock Island Trail and school zone flashers in the school zones (Not Funded);
- MoDOT’s TAP for the city of Rosebud to develop the Rock Island Trail State Park in city limits (Not Funded);
- HRSA’s Rural Communities Opioid Response Program for MRPC to continue work on the Meramec Region Recovery Network (Not Funded);
- DRA’s CIF for the city of Potosi to replace 6,000 feet of deficient natural gas pipeline (Funded);
- DNR’s Non-Playground Scrap Tire Program for Washington County to purchase 20 benches and four tables for the Towne Square Park in Potosi (Funded); and
- Missouri Department of Economic Development’s Community Development Block Grant for the city of Salem to upgrade the wastewater treatment facility to meet effluent requirements and remain compliant with the State Operating Permit (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 has worked in partnership with the Meramec Regional Development Corp., a U.S. Small Business Administration Certified Development Company, that provides SBA 504 loan programs to businesses in the region and across the state. MRPC also operates several revolving loan funds (RLF), which were created with EDA grants, USDA Intermediary Relending Funds, EDA CARES Act funds, and MO Dept. of Economic Development microenterprise funds as well as local matching funds.

The Meramec Region has used the MRDC SBA 504 program since 1991, the RLF since 1985 and the IRP since 2006, to assist in financing business start-ups and expansions.

Since 1991, 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. Using the RLF

program, which was established in 1985, the local development board 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.

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 212 grants, totaling \$3.87 million, to support local and regional projects. These grants have targeted businesses, local governments, schools and non-profits. The 2024 grant cycle provided funding for the Dixon Area Caring Recycling Center, the City of Rolla Recycling Center, a furniture redistribution and composting program for the Rolla Mission and an educational program on composting for the MO Environmental Education Association. 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. To curb expenses, latex paint was removed as an accepted material in 2017, as latex paint is technically not a hazardous waste. HHW served 1,117 households in FY 23-24. Recently vape products were added to the list of acceptable wastes. Paint is a costly household waste to process. 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 936, sponsored by Senator Mike Bernskoetter, 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 program was eliminated in April of

2016, an MRPC grant project has financially assisted counties in the Ozark Rivers district with transporting and recycling 252 tons of illegally dumped tires collected by county road crews.

Through the Ozark Rivers Solid Waste Management District's grant program, MRPC has organized 76 special waste collections since April 2003. These subsidized collections have recycled 750.28 tons of residential electronics, appliances and tires. It is of vital importance for every county to host a special collection to help reduce the occurrence and costs of illegal dumping and clean-up.

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 198 dump sites have been cleaned up, partnerships have been built and the region-wide survey has been updated. In doing so, an estimated 993 tons of trash has been removed and properly disposed; and an estimated 8.5 tons of tires have been collected for recycling. The district has recruited 1,905 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 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 FY24 the region was awarded \$97,809.53 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).

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 23-24, MRPC completed the Maries County Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP), using grant funds through the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) and matching county funds. 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.

HUD Housing Choice Voucher Program

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 FY2023-24, MRPC assisted, on average, 693 families each month by providing over \$3.1 million in rental assistance for the year. PHA staff performed 1,123 tenant inspections.

HUD Section 8 Homeownership

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.

Family Self-Sufficiency

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 2022-23, 65 families enrolled in the program, and four clients successfully completed their FSS contracts and received their escrow accounts, which had a combined total of \$15,444.22.

Naturally Meramec Consortium

MRPC continues to work with the Naturally Meramec Consortium in the eight-county region to promote local agri-tourism businesses and producers/buyers in the region. This project was funded through USDA and ended in September 2022. Additional funding for the FY22-23 and FY23-24 fiscal years was obtained through Delta Regional Authority (DRA) for the four-county area of Crawford, Dent, Phelps and Washington counties and ongoing work in the remaining four (Gasconade, Maries, Osage and Pulaski) coun-

ties was supported through EDA funds. The Meramec Region has a plethora of options for tourists visiting the region and the consortium worked to ensure the region is a destination spot for potential and returning visitors through online and print advertising on social media and in community and county fair books. The consortium's efforts were to increase the use of local products and services to grow jobs and to be a destination where visitors stay for more than a day. In 2023-24, MRPC hosted the "Taste of Washington County" event where local food producers were highlighted. Additionally, the consortium coordinated free educational opportunities including compost training, attended local meetings and events, launched the Naturally Meramec Consortium Food Hub Facebook group, established new regional Day Trips for the website (www.naturallymeramec.org) and completed an overhaul of the website to improve mobile interface and user experience. Maintenance of the website will continue, while additional funding for this project is sought.

MRPC Rural Opioid Initiatives

In fiscal year 2023-24, MRPC staff offered Seeking Safety classes inside Meramec Region jails and local high schools. Seeking Safety is an evidence-based curriculum, that helps clients be safe from trauma, including, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Substance Use Disorder, by emphasizing coping skills, grounding techniques and education. As of August 2024, 713 individuals have graduated through the Seeking Safety program.

The scope of the work across the opioid initiatives includes consortium meetings, a presence in the jails and 25th judicial system, a presence in schools, assistance to employers through an employer focused workshop, awareness activities and remembrance events, the purchase of Narcan for health departments and providing drug-take back boxes in the region.

MRPC has subcontracted with Prevention Consultants of Missouri to deliver a "Too Good for Drugs" program in the schools to 4,326 students and with Dr. Sean Siebert, Invent Yourself, LLC., to deliver Rehabilitation Through Innovation program in the jails to 201 residents.

MRPC worked with four counties to provide technical support with their local opioid settlement funds. Staff helped each county complete a SWOT analysis for their county and used the results to help create priorities along with creating applications and scoring processes for each county.

Services to Local Governments

Ordinance Codification: Since 1975, MRPC has provided ordinance codification services to cities — including Potosi, Vienna 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.

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.

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 and Bland with code enforcement issues, under contract.

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

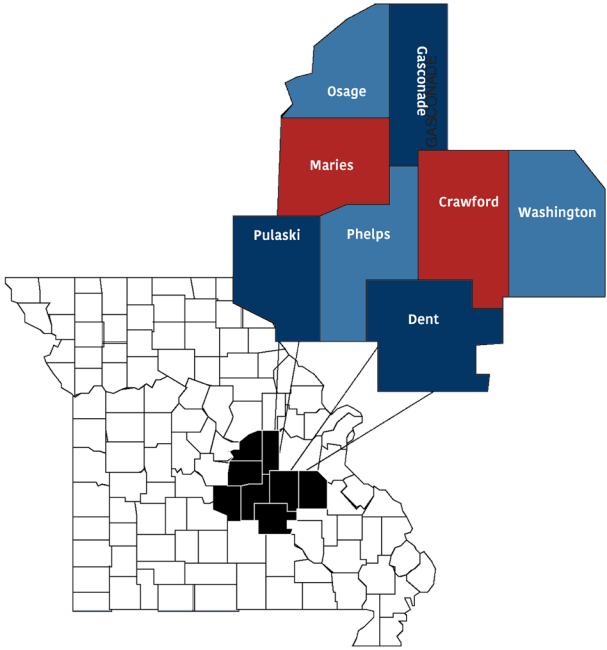
Meramec Region Facts

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

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.

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

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	

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 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. Washing-

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	

ton 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 rates. Despite COVID-19 layoffs, the average unemployment rate for the region from January to November 2024 was 3.61 percent, slightly lower than the state average at 3.73 percent, but higher than the 3.1 percent in 2023. The U.S. average for Jan.-Nov. 2024 was 4.04 percent.

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	

Unemployment	
Employed	77,491
Unemployed	3,284
Total Labor Force.....	90,963
Region's unemployment rate.....	3.61%
State's unemployment rate.....	3.73%
U.S. unemployment rate.....	4.04%
*All data compiled by averaging Jan. to Nov. 2024 data. Source: Missouri Department of Economic Development, MRPC	

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

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

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	

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 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

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	

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 decreased slightly.

The 2024 Missouri Directory of Manufacturers listed 454 manufacturing firms in the region, compared to 457 in 2023.

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 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

Regional Industrial Employment

Employed persons 16 and over.....	80,436
Agriculture, forestry, fishing & hunting, & 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

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 Oct. 1, 2024

CRAWFORD COUNTY

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

DENT COUNTY

Earl Brown, representing people with disabilities
Kyle Williams, 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
Tammy Bruckerhoff, representing tourism

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

Rich Eisterhold, representing for-profit
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 lending institutions

PHELPS COUNTY

John Money, representing healthcare
Wesley Williams, mayor of Edgar Springs
Kent Bagnall, representing for-profit
Patti Chism, 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
Rick Krawiecki, mayor of St. James
Taisia Gordon, representing small business
Matt McCarter, representing farming/agri business

PULASKI COUNTY

Brenda Doyle, representing seniors
Michael Dunbar, representing for-profit
Mike Null, mayor of Dixon
Sean Wilson, mayor of Waynesville
Chrystal Heenan, representing the mayor of
Crocker
Gene Newkirk, presiding commissioner
George Lauritson, mayor of St. Robert
Tai Kimes, representing minorities

WASHINGTON COUNTY

T.R. Dudley, representing for-profit
John Casey, representing transportation
Joseph Blount, mayor of Potosi
Nick Courtois, chairperson of Mineral Point
William Hall, 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.

2025 MRPC Leadership

Board & Staff

Chairman:Mary Heywood, Representing the Unemployed
Vice Chairman:.....Darryl Griffin, Osage County Presiding Commissioner
Secretary:Joey Auxier, Phelps County Presiding Commissioner
Treasurer:Sean Wilson, Waynesville Mayor
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

2025 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

GOLD MEMBERS

Great River Engineering

SILVER MEMBERS

Argyle Catering
Investment Realty
Gascosage Electric Cooperative

Pulaski County Sewer Distric #1
Bartlett & West - Jefferson City
Bartlett & West - Rolla
Missouri Engineering Co., Inc.

EXCHANGE MEMBERS

Owensville Area Chamber of Commerce
Salem Area Chamber of Commerce
Washington County Chamber of Commerce
Dixon Area Chamber of Commerce
Steelville Chamber of Commerce
Hermann Area Chamber of Commerce
Waynesville- St. Robert Chamber of Commerce

2025

**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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