



MRPC Board of Directors Meeting 3-8-24 - MINUTES

- Norma - Pilot
- Martin - IA
- Francis - Transportation
- Sharon - LA and Marketing
- Jean - WI proxy
- Anne - Pilot Emeritus and MN
- John - Pilot Pro Tem and Culture and Heritage
- Jim - KY proxy
- Mark - MO
- Edmund - TN
- Holly - Secretary and IL
- Sabrina - ERA
- Susanne - National Office
- Lisa - IA (guest)

Meeting was called to order at 9:04am.

Pilot (Norma) notes minutes posted for approval. Motion was made to approve minutes by Pilot Pro Tem (John) and second by Secretary (Holly). Motion carried.

National Office presented the financial report. Pilot mentioned looking for organizations and businesses that want to use our co-op advertising, membership or sponsorship opportunities. She would like to create a sub-committee to push these items forward. LA (Sharon) suggested adding mention of the Red Bubble store in the newsletters and sending solicitations of our co-op advertising to chambers, CVBs and tourism organizations along the GRR. There was some discussion about American Cruise and Viking that advertise in Big River Magazine. The bottom line is the desire to generate revenue from our assets. Motion to approve financial reports by MN (Anne) and second by IL (Holly). Motion carried.

WI (Sherry), Francis (Transportation) and National Office shared a summary from their meeting with legal counsel regarding the MRT trademark.

1. The "MRT" mark used in conjunction with bicycling/trails is currently held by Mississippi Trail, Inc, a Tennessee non-profit that has been dissolved. The federal trademark is still active, however, because the owner has been dissolved, there is not an easy way to transfer that mark

to the Mississippi River Parkway Commission, Inc. The next maintenance document is due on February 24, 2025 and if this does not get filed the mark will be considered “dead” (there may or may not be a short waiting period in there), and can be claimed by another organization. Acquiring this mark is really the #1 goal of the Mississippi River Parkway Commission, Inc and should be planned for. I would estimate the cost to do so at \$4,000 to \$5,000. A part of acquiring the federal trademark that my firm recommends is hiring a 3rd party contractor to perform a “current use” search which details the current use of the mark in the country at the time it is prepared. This allows us to know that nobody else is using it, and to have a source of proof that at the time we applied, we are the first to use it which helps immensely in the enforcement of a trademark. USPTO registration is the “gold standard” for enforcement of a trademark within the US.

2. Prior to February 24, 2025, The Mississippi River Parkway Commission, Inc should also probably acquire state trademarks over “MRT” as used in conjunction with bicycling/trails in each of the 10 states. State trademarks serve as a way to publicly file a declaration that you are using a mark as of a certain date. i.e., it’s an easily provable first usage date. However, they are limited in geographical scope (hence, why it needs to occur in each state) and they do not help you in defending against somebody else’s claim that they used it first (this is the purpose of the 3rd party service described above). I would consider this as a “stop gap” while we wait for the federal mark to be killed by the USPTO.

3. For all trademarks acquired by the Mississippi River Parkway Commission, Inc, there should be some sort of license agreement with the state organizations that details the allowable uses of the trademarks. I would envision that there would be some sort of “membership agreement” that includes the use of the trademarks as a perk. This does not need to be complicated and may be able to be inserted into something which already exists.

Membership agreement - use is a perk of being a member. We could wait to pursue February of 2025. We could take first step of third party search for use now and spread out work and cost. MN said as states go back to their state commissions and investigate if they want to do it, starting the research now per state. To pursue the next steps, the board needs to support the Stop Gap effort and is this a promotion in marketing. All 10 states - best scenario but we’re going for US Bike Route and we’ll take what we can get. Executive committee should be the group that pursues the Stop Gap. IA made a motion that nationally we should go after it for continuity and WI made the second. Motion carried. Each state should report back to the National Office what is happening in each state. Third party search is part of work scope. National office, Sherry and Francis to meet with attorney.

ERA will be meeting on March 20. Chris Stein is with Operation Pollination effort. Additional proclamation signings April 19 in Twin Cities. U. of MN student group is engaged with the project. Encouraging others to sign proclamations up and down the River. Upper Mississippi and Great Lakes Venture collaboration - Joint Venture. “Eco-tourism” marketing forward. 100th Anniversary of the Upper Mississippi Refuge and dedication to the new Interpretive Center is June 22. uppermiss100.com - Incorporate 100th anniversary into things happening along the

Great River Road, “Year of the Refuge”. WI signed a proclamation and we expect MN and IA to do the same.

Culture and Heritage - The Refuge touches all Upper Mississippi River states. It’s a celebration of nature and all things outdoors along the Great River Road. MN is dedicating Drive the Great River Road to “getting outdoors.” It’s the first multi-use refuge in the US and started a new conservation movement. John is writing a local article on what this means.

Marketing is creating a database with state’s attractions and tourism groups. We’re also creating an accessibility list along the Great River Road.

2024 Annual Meeting will be in Winona, Minnesota. We’ll be looking to schedule meetings three year out moving forward.

State Updates-

- TN - They’ll be updating their CMP.
- IA - Reorganization of government looking to eliminate boards and commissions . Martin spoke to the governor and MRPC should be good.
- MN - MN DOT going to commission to look at archives like early art work. MN has been asked to comment on cell and power towers along the GRR. We are working to develop no stand. Our goal is not to take a stand but get planners to consider the GRR when they’re doing their planning process from the beginning.
- MO - 2 state legislators appointed to commission but no other appointments were made. Checked with MO DOT and nothing going on with boards and commissions
- WI - Also towers situation. All commissioners are reapplying. Our visitor guide is done.
- LA - NSB program - no announcements on grants and we’re still waiting.

10:35am Adjournment