

# **Minutes**

Southwest Michigan Planning Commission FULL COMMISSION MEETING Tuesday, August 24, 2021, 9:30 a.m.

Meeting Held in Person at Southwest Michigan Planning Commission Office and Remotely Via Zoom

# **MEMBERS PRESENT (in person):**

Freehling, Teri Sue, Chair, Berrien County Commissioner

Marchetti, Roseann, Vice Chair, Cass County Commissioner

Akinwale, Yemi, Treasurer, Berrien County Representative

Preston, Linda, Secretary, Cass County Representative

Gundersen, Kristen, Alternate Secretary, Berrien County Representative

Remus, Richard, Alternate Treasurer, Berrien County Representative

Doroh, Kurt, Van Buren County Commissioner

Hanson, Don, Van Buren County Commissioner

Hanson, Sandra, Van Buren County Representative

Janssen, Judy, Van Buren County Representative

Meeks, Donnie, Berrien County Commissioner (arrived at 10:30)

Pantaleo, Paul, Berrien County Representative

Schueneman, James, Berrien County Representative

## **MEMBERS PRESENT (via Zoom):**

Curran, Jim, Berrien County Commissioner

DeLong, Don, Cass County Representative

Foerster, David, Van Buren County Representative

Janssen, Judy, Van Buren County Representative

Laylin, Leon, Cass County Representative

Morris, Zach, Van Buren County Economic Development Ex-Officio

(remote by medical necessity) Patterson-Gladney, Gail, Van Buren County Commissioner

Payne, Gloria, Berrien County Representative

Stauffer, Dick, Berrien County Representative

Torzynski, Robert, Pokagon Band Representative

Tyler, Doug, Cass County Representative

#### **MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Fette, Dan, Berrien County Representative Newton, Matthew, Van Buren County Representative Stover, Jim, Berrien County Representative

# **STAFF PRESENT:**

K. John Egelhaaf, Executive Director Kris Martin, Associate Planner

## 1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Teri Sue Freehling called the meeting to order at 9:36 a.m. and led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance. Associate Planner, Kris Martin took roll call and a quorum was present.

## 2. ACCEPTANCE AND/OR REVISION OF CONSENT AGENDA

Chair Freehling presented the Agenda. Roseann Marchetti moved to "ACCEPT THE CONSENT AGENDA AS PRESENTED." Jim Schueneman seconded. A roll call vote was taken. The motion carried.

- a. Meeting Agenda\*
- b. Minutes of Commission Meeting, June 15, 2021\*
- c. Chairman's Report
- d. Treasurer's Report\*

**Motion to ACCEPT** 

- 1. Roseann Marchetti
- 2. Jim Schueneman

**CHANGES?** None

## 3. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Motion to ACCEPT
1. Linda Preston
2. Roseann Marchetti

Director Egelhaaf gave a brief overview of the report and stated that an outside accounting firm will be evaluating our financial system. Among the processes to be reviewed and evaluated is the management of our indirect expense. Currently our process is complicated and an outside accounting firm can review the way we currently do this and recommend a way to do it better. We have two different pieces of accounting software the currently do not integrate with one another. The evaluation will look for a way to potentially connect them. Rich Remus asked if this will replace our current CPAs. It will not. It is a one-time contract that will take about 6-8 weeks. We will continue to use Blossomland Accounting for payroll and Kruggel Lawton for our annual audit.

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding from congress update: The funding is going through the EDA and is an interesting opportunity between the federal government and SWMPC. The funding is split between six different categories. To apply for this funding EDA recommends that applicants focus not on multiple applications and categories but rather, toward a single application and category. EDA will assist with applications. EDA's new funding category is Travel and Recreation Tourism. We are interested in supporting projects that communities would like to implement keeping in mind that they must also align with EDA funding goals.

Vice Chair Marchetti asked if the statewide communities planning grant is helpful with local master plans. Director Egelhaaf responded saying it is statewide planning focused, not local

Don Hanson asked where broadband fits in this category. Director Egelhaaf said the infrastructure funding is coming soon with the new proposed infrastructure bill. Questions can be sent to Director Egelhaaf.

Rich Remus asked if the two colleges in our region, SWMC and LMC, received funding. Chair Freehling stated that like local units of government, LMC also received ARPA funding (\$1.1 million).

Linda Preston moved to "ACCEPT THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT." Roseann Marchetti seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

## 4. AD HOC COMMITTEE FOR EX. DIRECTOR EVALUATION

Chair Freehling stated that SWMPC needs one board member from each county to assist with the committee to evaluate the director. The people who volunteered are Don DeLong from Cass County, Rich Remus from Berrien County, and Kurt Dorah from Van Buren County.

## 5. SWMPC REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION WORK PLAN\*

Dir. Egelhaaf

Motion to APPROVE

1. Kurt Dorah

2. Yemi Akinwale

Director Egelhaaf explained the SWMPC Regional Transportation Work Plan and how it differs from the urban transportation programs in its rural community focus. Roseann Marchetti said our transportation planners do good work and that she is a NATS member. Kurt Dorah noted that Tony Dacoba is retiring from Van Buren Public Transit in September 2021 and that they are currently in the process of finding a replacement.

Rich Remus asked how the work plan compares to last year and if there is more funding from SPR funds. Egelhaaf responded that there is a nominal increase. Remus asked if funding rolls over from one fiscal year into another. Egelhaaf responded that the only instance of that is with the asset management funding from FY 2021 to FY 2022.

Kurt Dorah moved to accept the "SWMPC REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION WORK PLAN." Don DeLong seconded the motion, the motion was approved unanimously.

# 6. PLANNER PRESENTATION – Director Egelhaaf

Director Egelhaaf presented a detailed explanation of the SW Michigan Food Branding Project. He stated that the group is about a month away from completing the project. SWMPC wrote a grant to the US Dept. of Agriculture and received just under \$40k. After SWMPC and the Southwest Michigan Local Food Council (SWMLFC) received the USDA grant funding, there was an RFP process and a consultant Johnson Rauhoff (JR) was

awarded the project from a wide range of applicants. JR is located in our region. The local food council has been the primary touch point for this project. Farm employment and income have experienced significant declines, but there are also issues with equity, access, and affordability to fresh, local food.

SWMLFC Food Brand Priorities included key insights from over 40 individuals.

The brand and tag line that has resulted is called: Southwest Michigan Fresh - Share our Harvest.

Linda Preston said there are more people canning in our region. Kurt Doroh asked about being able to get local produce like blueberries in the stores in our SW Michigan area.

Rich Remus asked about our regional map of the crops grown in our region and if there is an update coming. Director Egelhaaf replied that there could be if there is funding or a project that could include an update to the regional map of food and crops. Paul Pantaleo asked if we had contact with farmers, growers, and producers. Director Egelhaaf replied that they have but their busy schedules are a challenge.

## 7. SUPPORT OF SB 514

Changes Proposed to PA 188 for Broadband Expansion via Township Special Assessment

"The construction, improvement, and maintenance of communications infrastructure, including broadband and high-speed internet." This would allow for special assessment.

Teri Freehling asked if we wanted formal support for this bill. Zach Morris said that he supports the bill on behalf of Market Van Buren and that we need to be creative to solve the broadband problem.

Kurt Dorah moved to "SUPPORT SB 514." Sandra Hanson seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Kurt Dorah said that we need a primary contact for broadband. Director Egelhaaf stated that there could be representatives from each county to create a committee or have a primary contact. Linda Preston said we can work collectively but to reach out to your local representatives.

#### 8. PUBLIC COMMENT

None

#### 9. PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

Roseann Marchetti said they have a new Cass County Administrator, Mr. Newton. There are many improvements to Cassopolis after MSU's vision session and grants. She said to check out the new park and trails in the Cassopolis area. Linda Preston spoke about the bridge project in Pokagon Twp. and that they were a recipient of a historic bridge project award.

# 10. ADJOURNMENT

The Chair declared the meeting adjourned at 11:11 a.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

K. John Egelhaaf, AICP

Date: September 21, 2021