

Minutes

Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Arkansas
Helena Chamber of Commerce
111 Hickory Hill Drive
Helena-West Helena, Arkansas
May 11, 2012

Commissioners Present

Joe St. Columbia, Chairman
Carole Bulloch
Garland Hayes
Bobby Kennedy
Ron Killingsworth
Terri Austin McCullough

Commissioners Absent

Lois Boyd
Bob Ware
Phyllis Stinson
Molly Houseworth Jackson

Technical Advisors/Department Staff/Guests Present

Marla Crider, Great River Road Division Director
Dr. Ruth Hawkins, Executive Director, Delta Byways Regional Tourism Association
Paula Miles, Delta Byways Regional Tourism Association
Julia Hart, Arkansas Highway & Transportation Department
Dottie Boyles, Arkansas Department of Parks & Tourism
Melissa Martinez, *The Daily World*, Helena-West Helena
Willard McCullough
Betty Kennedy

Call to Order

Chairman Joe St. Columbia called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. on Friday, May 11, 2012.

Approval of the Minutes from the Previous Meeting

Minutes from the previous meeting were approved with the following corrections: Ron Killingsworth should have been listed under Commissioners absent instead of Commissioners present, and the motion under Per Diem Rate was reworded to read, "Carole Bulloch moved the Commission approve the \$60.00 Per Diem."

Corridor Management Plan Workshop

Technical Advisor Julia Hart reported on the Corridor Management Plan Workshop, held on April 16, and lead by Byway Specialist Rob Balmes of Duluth, MN. She also provided an update regarding a loss of Federal funding for the Scenic Byways Program. Legislation passed recently by Congress maintains the Scenic Byways designation; however, grant funding was eliminated. Enhancement dollars have been lumped into one fund and dispensed to state highway and transportation departments to be used as needed. Organizations are concerned that other highway and transportation needs will take higher priority and overshadow the need for grants along designated byways. According to Ms. Hart, it will take groups at the grassroots level to encourage Congress to re-establishment Scenic Byways funding.

The main purpose of the recent Corridor Management Plan Workshop was to update the listing of tourism related businesses and historic landmarks along the scenic byways. Dr. Ruth Hawkins stated there were 14 people in attendance from six different counties at the workshop. Dr. Hawkins made assignments to those who attended the meeting as well as those in the Delta Byways region to assist with updating the list.

National MRPC Board Meeting

Chairman Joe St. Columbia and Terri Austin McCullough attended the Mississippi River Parkway Commission Strategic Planning Session held in St. Louis, MO, on March 30, 2012. Chairman St. Columbia reported the meeting lasted 10 hours and Arkansas was well represented. It was discussed that the mission statement for the MRPC needed to be updated in order to meet the goals and challenges facing the organization. Proposed changes to the MRPC mission statement are in the works and should be presented at the national meeting in September.

The Commission requested Chairman St. Columbia send a copy of the financial report to every commissioner.

Great River Road Geocaching Report

Marla Crider reported that as of May 10, 2012, the Great River Road caches throughout the Arkansas Delta have been found a total of 1,841 times, up from 1,794 on March 4, 2012. As of May 10, 2012, the Great River Road power trail caches, located in Chicot and Desha counties, have been found a total of 5,424, up from 4,935 on March 4. Recent comments from cache logs were read.

Tri-State Blues Trail

Marla Crider reported on the newly created Tri-State Blues Trail. The Mississippi Blues Festival has decided to work with Arkansas and promote blue festivals in the delta region. Memphis, Tennessee has also decided to join in. It will be heavily promoted and the three states are collaborating on website.

Technical Advisor Update

Julia Hart reported that final Byways grants should be announced in the next few weeks.

Miscellaneous

Jones' Barbecue in Marianna won the American Classic Award from the James Beard Foundation. The restaurant has been featured on CBS Sunday Morning, as well as the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, generating positive press for the Arkansas Delta town.

The Johnny Cash Music Festival is scheduled for October 5, 2012. The King Biscuit Blues Festival in Helena-West Helena is also scheduled during the same weekend: October 4-6. The Arkansas Department of Parks & Tourism (ADPT) will orchestrate a strong media push over the next few months promoting a music-filled weekend in the Arkansas Delta.

ADPT's travel writer, Kim Williams, is scheduled to meet with researchers from Geiger and Associates, a national public relations firm contracted by the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism to manage a Delta media tour October 3-7. Ms. Williams plans to travel with the Geiger team June 17-23 and meet with Delta-based business owners and organizations that will be assisting approximately 20 general and special interest journalists with any special needs during the October media tour.

The Delta Conference Center and Resort, located in Tillar, Arkansas (Desha County), is nearing completion. The Center is a state-of-the-art hunting lodge and shooting resort for both novice and professional shooters. It will specialize in waterfowl hunting and world-class shooting, including sporting clays and Olympic bunker trap shooting. When completed, it will feature a 72 room hotel, 17,000 square feet of meeting rooms, a pro shop, and restaurant.

The next meeting will be held in Forest City in August. Commissioner Ron Killingsworth stated he would notify the group as soon as he found a meeting location.

With no further business the meeting adjourned at 11:16 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joe St. Columbia, Chairman
Mississippi River Parkway Commission

Marla Crider, Director
Great River Road Division