

Minutes

The Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Arkansas
DeWitt Campus—Phillips Community College—U of A
1210 Ricebelt, Highway 165 South
DeWitt, Arkansas
December 2, 2008

Commissioners Present

Garland Hayes
Bobby Kennedy
Taralou Dunklin
Molly Houseworth Jackson
Phyllis Stinson
James Banks
Joe St, Columbia

Commissioners Absent

Eva Hollowell
Carole Bulloch
Alvin Meyer

Guests

Kathy Radomski, Director of Business and Industry Training, Phillips Community College, UA
Christina Verderosa, *DeWitt Era-Enterprise*

Technical Advisors/ Department Staff

Nancy Clark, Great River Road Division Director
Julia Hart, Technical Advisor, Arkansas Highway & Transportation Department
Jay Robinson, Technical Advisor, Arkansas Economic Development Commission
Dottie Boyles, Administrative Assistant, Arkansas Department of Parks & Tourism

Call to Order

Chairman Garland Hayes called the meeting to order, welcomed and introduced the guests and thanked everyone for taking time from their busy schedules to participate in the meeting of the Mississippi River Parkway Commission. Chairman Hayes announced that one of our two new commissioners, Phyllis Stinson from Clarendon in Monroe County was present, and he introduced her. Carole Bulloch from Monticello in Drew County was unable to attend the meeting due to a schedule conflict.

Welcome

Chairman Hayes introduced Kathy Radomski, Director of Business and Industry Training, Phillips Community College UA, DeWitt Campus.

Kathy Radomski welcomed everyone to DeWitt, and reported on activities in DeWitt and the surrounding community. She is a member of People Revitalizing and Investing in DeWitt's Economy (P.R.I.D.E.). DeWitt has been added to a growing list of the Main Street Arkansas's Downtown Network (ADN) which is a part of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. ADN is a program that serves a broader base of Arkansas communities focused on revitalizing their historic commercial core. It offers resources, education, technical assistance and expertise to small cities and towns across Arkansas. It is done through a Four-Point Approach:

(1) organization—provides the stability to build upon and maintain a long-term effort; (2) design—leads to an improved environment, that reflects the present as well as the past; (3) promotion—enhances the image of downtown as an exciting community center; a meeting place and a gathering spot filled with activity, thriving stores, successful businesses, quality service and social activity; (4) economic restructuring—involves the rebuilding of the downtown’s economic vitality, which is the ultimate goal of all Main Street Programs. This involves business retention and recruitment, the development of new merchandising techniques and finding new uses for vacant spaces. Ms. Radomski said the citizens of DeWitt have adopted the slogan “Meet me on the Square,” and want to work together to see this project come to fruition.

The Phillips County Community College received a grant to start a renewable energy program with classes scheduled to start in fall of 2009. Ms. Radomski said several plants in the area will provide expertise to include Soy Energy Group in DeWitt. Eventually, wind and solar energy will be added to the program.

Ms. Radomski also announced “The Nature of Agritourism Retreat” which will take place on February 9-12, 2009. It is presented by The Business of Birding Institute, and will include field trips, land management and enhancing habitat, creating a business plan for agritourism, involving youth, understanding birders, interpretation and field skills, private/public lands (a winning combination) hospitality, marketing and public relations and resources for development. She said the registration fee is only \$250 because most of the cost is underwritten by grants. For online information and registration: www.arkagriculture.org/aai.

Approval of the Minutes from the Previous Meeting

Joe St. Columbia moved to approve the minutes from the previous meeting. James Banks seconded and the motion carried.

Annual Meeting of the National Mississippi River Parkway Commission Report

Garland Hayes reported on the annual meeting held in Bettendorf, Iowa, on September 24-27, 2008. The meeting was held at the Paradise Hotel which had very good facilities for the event. Several special field trips were planned for the 70th anniversary of the Mississippi River Parkway Commission meeting, and proved to be educational as well as enjoyable. Mr. Hayes stated Arkansas was well represented by Commissioners and Technical Advisors. The governors of each member state sent proclamations, and they were presented and displayed throughout the meeting. Commissioner Hayes showed the Commission one of the Arkansas annual reports which were sent to the national office.

Semi-Annual Meeting of the National Mississippi River Parkway Commission

Commissioner Garland Hayes announced that the next meeting of the National Mississippi River Parkway Commission will be held in Memphis, Tennessee, on April 16-18, 2009. The meeting will be held at the Springhill Suites by Marriott, 21 North Main Street, Memphis. He said he thought Arkansas would have good attendance.

Taralou Dunklin moved to approve payment of the registration fees and travel expenses for Commissioners, and registration fees only for Technical Advisors to attend the semi-annual meeting of the National Mississippi River Parkway Commission to be held April 16-18, 2009, in Memphis, Tennessee. Molly Jackson seconded and the motion carried.

Geocaching Project for 70th Anniversary of Great River Road Update

Nancy Clark reported the Arkansas portion of the Great River Road 70th Anniversary geocaching celebration has concluded. A series of geocaches were created specifically for the 70th anniversary celebration, and were placed in each of the 10 counties through which the Great River Road traverses in Arkansas: Mississippi, Crittenden, St. Francis, Lee, Phillips, Monroe, Arkansas, Desha, Drew, and Chicot counties. To date caches have been found 219 times. Many of the cachers stated in their logs that they made a special trip to find the caches, and they are participating in the 10-state Great River Road geocache project. Many great comments were written by the geocachers who participated in the project. The program was a wonderful opportunity for individuals and families to learn about the historic river and the rich culture of the region that lies along its banks. Prizes were awarded at the meeting of the National Mississippi River Parkway Commission meeting in September, 2008 in Iowa. Each state was responsible for getting donations for a gift basket to be presented to prize winners at the meeting, and Arkansas shipped the basket immediately following the meeting in Iowa. The project proved to be a very good way to draw visitors to the area, and the caches will remain in place to draw more visitors in the future.

Delta Byways Update/Rural Heritage Development Initiative Report (RHDI)

Nancy Clark stated that Dr. Ruth Hawkins had a conflict and could not attend the meeting, but sent the following report. Three grants were received from the National Scenic Byways Program: (1) The Arkansas Great River Road National Scenic Byway received an administrative grant of \$25,000; (2) Crowley' Ridge Parkway National Scenic Byway received an administrative grant of \$25,000; (3) a grant for \$510,600 for a coordinated marketing and interpretative program for the region served by both National Scenic Byways. The grant includes monies for Beth Wiedower's position at RHDI for two more years, funds her travel, her technical support to communities, and implementation of various projects. It also includes funds to assist the MRPC Culture and Heritage Committee in gathering oral histories, developing themed itineraries, and upgrading Interpretive Center signage.

Dr. Hawkins also reported the addition of three new Interpretive Centers in Arkansas: Parkin Archeological State Park, Hampson Archeological Museum State Park, and Lakeport Plantation. Commissioner Joe St. Columbia reported that he had participated on the conference call for the selection of the new interpretive centers. He said it was a complicated process, and all entities that applied were not accepted. He thought that Arkansas's applications deserved to be selected.

Dr. Hawkins' report also included an update on the overall signage plan which includes the Great River Road Interpretive Centers. She said she visited with Dan Flowers, Director of the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department who advised that new wayfinding policies and procedures will be official in January of 2009 through the Federal Highway Administration.

Dr. Hawkins asked that copies of the new Arkansas Great River Road brochure be distributed to the Commissioners. Nancy Clark reported that copies of the brochure were shipped to Arkansas Welcome Centers.

Arkansas Scenic Byways Brochure

Julia Hart, Technical Advisor with the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD) distributed copies of the new scenic byways brochure which includes information on all the national and state scenic byways in Arkansas. She said the process took four years with multiple re-writes before 100,000 copies were printed. The Highway Department has purchased an advertisement in the Fall Newspaper Insert which the Department of Parks and Tourism runs in all the state newspapers, and several out-of-state papers. This will generate inquiries for the brochure, and it can be ordered from the AHTD Web site. Ms. Hart reported that Parks & Tourism is storing the bulk of the brochures at its literature warehouse on Cantrell Road, and makes distribution to the Welcome Centers as well as bulk requests.

Miscellaneous

Julia Hart, Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department, reported that the Great River Road National Scenic Byway Gateway Project in West Memphis let bids for construction in September. She also said that Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi and Louisiana were making a single application for National Great River Road status with an application deadline of December 17, 2008.

Commission Meeting Schedule

Chairman Garland Hayes reminded Commissioners to return their TR1s to Nancy Clark for processing. A discussion ensued as to the next meeting date, and it was decided that a meeting would be held in February if schedules allowed, otherwise the April meeting in Memphis would be considered. Chairman Hayes expressed appreciation to Kathy Radomski and the staff of the DeWitt Campus of the Phillips Community College for hosting the meeting, and serving the delicious lunch. The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted:

Garland Hayes, Chairman
Mississippi River Parkway Commission

Nancy Clark, Director
Great River Road Division