



**Southwest Missouri Council of Governments
Board Meeting
Wednesday, March 28, 2025
9:00 a.m.
Kentwood Hall
700 E St Louis St.
Springfield, MO**

Attendance:

Members:

Jonathan Sanders – Springfield	Duane Lavery – GRO Marshfield
Tina Didreckson - Crane	Nathan Adams – TREKK Design
Neil Brady – Bartlett West	Kristen Haseltine – SMCC
Commissioner Wayne Blades – Stone County	Hollie Elliot – Dallas County
Cindy Stephens – OTC	Sam Rost – Marshfield
Mark Colussy – Branson	Dawne Gardner – Kimberling City
Rick Bekemeier – MTVEDC	Chris Tabor – Republic
J Howard Fisk – Greene County	Callie Linville – CU
Christy Beshore – Mt. Vernon EDC	Mary Kromrey – OWN, Inc
Cameron Smith – Ozark	Natalie McNish – Marshfield
Andrew Novinger – Shaffer & Hines Engineering	Richard Asbill – Cassville
Megan Gandy – Greenfield	Dave Engroff – Greenfield
Todd Wiesehan – Christian County	Josh Sanders – Allegier, Martin & Associates
Pres. Commissioner John Crawford – Dallas County	
Pres. Commissioner Bob Senninger – Lawrence County	

Members on Zoom:

Devin Sonnenfelt – White River Electric	Jerry Harman – H2Ozarks
Carrie Howlett - Aurora	Kesley Davis – OakStar Bank
Chris Coulter – Greene County	Nick Woodman - Nixa
Cindy Robbins - Nixa	Jason Lewis - Aurora
Nathan Piche – Indian Point	

Partners and Guests:

Hon. Eric Burlison – U.S. House of Representatives	Jered Taylor – Congressman Burlison’s Office
Sen. Sandy Crawford – State Senator	Rep. Stephanie Hein – State Representative
Rep. Jeremy Dean – State Representative	Roddy Rogers – SWMO Water
Tanya Turner - MoDNR	Karissa Kary – FMO
Rene Frazier – Oats Transit	Mike Ussery – Senator Schmitt
Jacob Wimsatt – MoDOT	Alice Wingo – CFO
David Knaut – OTO	Jessica Hunt – Springfield Workforce Development

Sarah Havens – MU Extension
Cheri Hagler – Springfield
Rusty Worley – DSA
Ronda Burnett – MDC

Ryan DeBoef – Hahn/DeBoef Government Relations
Anna Evans – SMCC
Sherri Rhuems – SW WIB

Partners and Guests on Zoom:

Brittni Bates – Mt Vernon Chamber
Sherri Rhuems – SW WIB
Chad Egan - EDA
Tianna Brooks - Congressman Alford

Janice Piper – Senior Age
Ronald Seyl – MoDED
Ashley Schnake - MDC

Staff:

Garrett Colony
Aishwarya Shrestha
Kelsi Burton

Thomas Cunningham
Courtney Pinkham
Morganza Byrd

Open Meeting

1. Call to Order – Cindy Stephens

2. Pledge of Allegiance

3. Introductions and Announcements

4. Approval of March 28, 2025, Meeting Agenda – Cindy Stephens

Howard Fisk motioned, John Crawford seconded to approve the March 28, 2025 Agenda. Motion carried.

5. Approval of January 22, 2025, Meeting Minutes - Cindy Stephens

Bob Senninger motioned, Duane Lavery seconded to approve the January 22, 2025 Minutes. Motion carried.

Legislative Reports

State Legislative Reports

-State Senator Sandy Crawford

Senator Crawford expressed frustration about the previous year as not much was accomplished. However, this year feels like a new day in the Senate. The Senate has already passed several pieces of legislation to the House, and they've sent several bills to the Senate as well.

Sen. Crawford provided an update regarding the budget stating that budget work is already underway, but it is not yet in the Senate at this point.

One of the issues she is working on that affects many people is related to banking. As a former banker, she is always involved in banking legislation. Sadly, she noted that people have probably been affected by fraud in some way. Just recently, both her and her husband had their bank accounts compromised. She has heard from banks across the state that their loan losses are now equal to or even smaller than their fraud losses. Loan losses have always been a part of banking, but to see fraud losses on that same level is incredible.

To address this, she is working on legislation to strengthen fraud prevention. If someone commits fraud, this bill would give banks more tools to deal with it. She is also working on a "trusted contact" program. For example: if an individual is the only one on their bank account and tries to

wire \$50,000 to a new boyfriend in Jamaica, the bank has no legal recourse to stop it—even if they know it's a scam. With this new legislation, a trusted contact could be named by the account holder. This person wouldn't have access to the account but could be contacted if there's concern about fraud. For instance, if an elderly person (like Grandma) tried to make a suspicious transaction, the bank could reach out to the trusted contact to hopefully intervene and stop the scam.

This is especially important for our older population, who are often preyed upon by fraudsters. She is really excited about this legislation because I believe it will help people all across the state, especially vulnerable seniors.

In addition to banking, she is also working on issues related to local government. Since she lives with a County Commissioner, he's always pushing her to address local government concerns, which, she admits, makes my life a bit more challenging!

-State Representative Jeremy Dean

State Rep. Dean, stated that this year, we've seen a lot of movement in the House, and he would agree with what Senator Crawford mentioned about the Senate – both chambers are getting a lot of work done. He thanked the majority party for their focus on bipartisan work. They're working together to make the government and processes in Missouri more efficient. Of course, there will always be some big bills that may not be as agreeable to both sides, but overall, they've seen a lot of positive movement. One of the major areas they're focusing on this year is childcare. It's a critical issue, especially in economic development. Both sides of the aisle recognize that childcare is a significant barrier for many people trying to enter the workforce. It's too expensive and hard to find, and we're working together to address this. Solutions being discussed include tax credits and supporting businesses to provide childcare for their employees, which is essential for workforce retention and growth. He expects to see more progress on childcare policies in the coming months. Another major focus has been taxes. There's a lot of push for tax reductions, including income, sales, and property taxes. Everyone wants a tax cut, but we need to consider the impact of reducing taxes, especially on services. For example, if we cut income taxes, we risk losing important state services. If we lose funding for these services, the burden could fall on nonprofits, like churches, schools, and other organizations. We need to ensure that if tax cuts are made, there are incentives for these organizations to fill in the gaps left behind. Balancing tax cuts with the funding needed for essential services, like education, public safety, and healthcare, is critical. We also continue to monitor issues like video lottery terminals, which are becoming a more prominent topic in Springfield. It's important to give communities the power to decide what works best for them while ensuring a well-rounded approach to meeting their needs.

-A librarian from Stone County stated she is concerned about losing funding for libraries, more of a comment than a question.

-Jeremy stated he has heard this a lot and feels that it should be a targeted approach

-State Representative Stephanie Hein

State Rep. Hein stated, as State Representative Dean mentioned, most of her time has been spent working within the budget world. So, understanding what's happening outside of that can be challenging, but it's essential for the work we do. This process has been especially interesting because we have a lot of new leadership across the board. For instance, we have a new governor, a new speaker in the House, a new budget chair, and a new ranking member on the budget committee. With all these changes, it has taken some time to figure out how everyone will operate and how they want to move forward. So far, we've been able to function and collaborate effectively despite these changes. One challenge that has come up is the introduction of a new accounting system in the state, called MOVERS. This has slowed down some of our work, particularly in

generating bills. She had expected to be defending bills on the floor yesterday, but due to this slowdown, that has been delayed by a week. A couple of key points she wants to highlight as you work through the budget process: Most people in this room are likely impacted by the budget in some form. It's important to stay in communication with your representatives, especially if you have line items in the budget that were approved last year and need to continue for your projects. Double-check with your representatives and senators to ensure that funding for these line items is still intact as the budget moves through the process. Budget changes do occur, and we've had a few projects that we thought would be reinstated but were not. We are now working to address those issues. Currently, we have completed the budget markup, and we are moving forward with the next steps in the process.

- Commissioner Wayne Blades asked for clarification, House Bill 903, whether it was personal or commercial

- Rep. Hein and Rep. Dean clarified that it is for personal property taxes.

- Commissioner Blades stated 86% goes to schools, then it goes to firefighters, the library, and the elderly. He expressed how important this funding is. He asked them to look at cutting on the state side, instead of the small community.

- Rep. Hein thanked him and reminded everyone how important it is to reach out and express your feelings to your legislators

- Presiding Commissioner John Crawford stated that it would hurt Dallas County because it thrives on personal property tax and does not have much sales tax.

- Sen. Sandy Crawford stated that the governor is reviewing all the taxes across the board. She hopes that they take an overall view and consider how it will impact the local communities.

-Congressman Burlison's Office

Congressman Burlison commented that the first few months in Washington, D.C. have been busy and a stark contrast to the frustration he felt during his first two years. Coming from Missouri's House and Senate, where they focused on balancing the budget and fiscal discipline, he struggled with Washington's inefficiencies and unchecked spending. However, since January, things have started to change. Despite a divided government, we've secured key wins for Southwest Missouri, particularly in infrastructure and Table Rock Lake. He was appointed to the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, focusing on highways, waterways, and railroads—all crucial to our region. One of his priorities has been improving the relationship between the Army Corps of Engineers and the communities around Table Rock Lake. Thanks to the hard work of his staff, especially Jared Taylor, we've made significant progress, including securing language in a bill that addresses property encroachments around the lake. Additionally, we secured drinking water from Stockton Lake, a long-standing project that many, including Senator Roy Blunt, have worked on for years. He is also working on a highway resurfacing bill, with I-44 as a top priority. As part of the subcommittee, He has ensured this project gets the attention it deserves, particularly for additional lanes throughout Southwest Missouri. Beyond transportation, he serves on the Oversight Committee, where they've investigated the Biden family's financial activities. Recently, he reviewed suspicious activity reports that suggest criminal behavior, including money laundering. Now, the committee is focusing on improving efficiency within the Department of Defense, and he is also chairing the Economic Growth, Energy, and Regulatory Reform Committee. A major concern is China's growing influence, and to protect our economy, we need to restore U.S. manufacturing, cut spending, and explore innovations like small modular nuclear reactors to boost energy and economic growth.

-Mike Ussery – U.S. Senator Schmitt's Office

Mike stated This year, the focus has been on confirmations, with most major agency confirmations completed. The budget for the current fiscal year, which includes some spending cuts and modest defense increases, was finalized recently. Moving forward, there are plans to extend the 2017 tax cuts and introduce additional tax measures. Border security and immigration are also priorities, and these may be addressed in one or two bills, depending on how Congress negotiates it. The senator has also worked hard to ensure Boeing was awarded the Next Generation Air Dominance contract, a multi-billion-dollar deal that will create thousands of jobs in the St. Louis area. This contract, replacing the F-22 fighter with the F-47 stealth fighter, is a significant win. Additionally, the senator has reintroduced the "Eraser Act," which mandates eliminating three regulations for every new one introduced. This ties into his concerns about government spending, echoing Congressman Burlison's views. Having served as a state senator and treasurer, the senator is familiar with fiscal responsibility, noting that state governments operate more efficiently than the federal government. He's become increasingly aware of the dysfunction in Washington, D.C., where bureaucratic inefficiencies and unchecked spending have been the norm for decades. The lack of a regular budgeting process at the federal level has led to overspending and mismanagement. The senator believes that boosting domestic energy production and cutting spending will bring manufacturing back to the U.S. While the process will take time, we're already seeing progress. By making the country more business-friendly, we can create jobs and ensure fair wages for all workers.

-Tianna Brooks – Congressman Alford's Office

Tianna stated she came from Governor Parson's administration and now serves as Congressman Alford's communications advisor in the district, alongside field rep duties. We have 24 counties, so she has been visiting small businesses, learning about the communities, especially around the Kansas City and Columbia areas. Last week, they had a roundtable with the U.S. Chamber at Missouri Pacific Lumber in Fayette, discussing the importance of extending and enhancing the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act to support economic recovery and global competitiveness for American businesses.

The Congressman regularly features a Small Business of the Month on the House floor, along with a Veteran of the Month. They've been gathering content for these recognitions while meeting local businesses and veterans. The Congressman, who serves on the Small Business Committee and Appropriations Committee, has introduced the SBA to Main Street Act. This legislation aims to decentralize the Small Business Administration by relocating employees to local communities, improving customer service for small business owners. She has enjoyed traveling, learning about the district, and connecting with residents. I look forward to future opportunities to meet more people and continue supporting our local businesses. If anyone has any questions, feel free to reach out!

They have an office located in Lebanon. They will be visiting Marshfield and Polk County next month.

Ryan DeBoef – He stated as the legislative session nears its end, taxes and economic development will be major topics, particularly property and sales taxes. Property taxes have been a focal point due to significant increases in Kansas City, which sparked public outcry, especially after residents were asked to finance sports stadiums. This has led to various proposals, and discussions around income taxes may emerge as well. The Senate plans to consolidate tax ideas before making decisions.

Also in the spotlight are minimum wage, sick leave, and childcare issues, along with budget changes that could affect local projects. Some funds have been reallocated, leading to frustration over unfulfilled projects. If your project has been impacted, feel free to reach out, as there's still

time to address concerns and ensure it's included in the budget. There's a push to get more clarity on these issues as the session wraps up, so stay tuned for updates.

-Andrea Sitzes stated the discussion on tax cut bills, especially sales tax - For smaller communities, this is very impactful. If the state wants to cut its portion, that is fine, but it should not cut the local communities' portion.

-Ryan stated that he is hearing this from other communities.

Business – Cindy Stephens

1. Program Updates – SMCOG Staff

Other Business – Cindy Stephens

N/A

Partner Updates

-MoDOT – Jacob Wimsatt and Beth Schaller

Jacob provided a brief update on the development of the 2026/2030 STIP program, which includes updates to long-range freight and rail plans. To gather public input, a survey has been launched for the 25-year plan, and details are available on the organization's website. Additionally, maintenance crews are actively working on trash pickup efforts, and volunteer programs are available to assist. Two key initiatives were highlighted: Keeping Missouri Beautiful, which focuses on maintaining clean public spaces, and Sponsor a Highway, which allows organizations and individuals to contribute to roadway maintenance.

-Rep. Hein added that the groundbreaking for the I-44 project is next Friday.

-Ozarks Transportation Organization (OTO) – David Knaut

David commented, thanking the legislators for working to get funding for the I-44 Project. They are working on getting funding for Route M. OTO Trail and sidewalk program is coming up, March 31st.

-MoDNR – Tonya Turner

Tonya Turner, stated the recreational season is starting, go see our state parks. Billy Stone is the new wastewater operation trainer in our region.

-MDC – Ronda Burnett

Ronda commented that this summer, they are launching a Community Conservation Job Corps program in partnership with local agencies. The pilot program will coordinate summer interns to complete community conservation and infrastructure projects more efficiently. By working in teams, interns can accomplish land stewardship tasks in days rather than weeks. Enhanced coordination will also support projects receiving cost-share assistance from the Missouri Department of Conservation, ensuring greater success and providing hands-on conservation training for participants.

-Ozark Region Workforce Development Board – Cynthia Collins

Cynthia thanked the legislators. It's valuable to hear firsthand how these issues affect the workforce and economic development. Serving the southern counties, we see the direct impact of taxes and economic policies on individuals every day. They recently moved to a new location at 1660 N. Campbell, with an entrance on Boonville. Since October, this move has significantly increased our daily traffic, with over 100 individuals already seeking work, training, or career assistance in March alone. Many have been laid off or are retraining to secure their livelihoods, and we appreciate the advocacy on their behalf. Additionally, they've been approved for multiple grants. One supports high pathways, providing training and employment opportunities for

incarcerated individuals. Another is the second round of the American Building Apprenticeship Program. We're also strengthening partnerships in rural counties to expand these opportunities.

- SW Missouri Workforce Investment Board – Sherrie Rhuems

Sherrie stated they serve Dade, Barry, and Lawrence counties and are currently working on our Youth Will Grant. Over three years, they will run three 32-week cohorts, serving 53 individuals aged 16-24. Participants will earn their GED, a PACT construction and industry-recognized credential, and develop leadership skills.

Additionally, they offer internship programs for high school juniors and seniors. They cover wages and workers' compensation, making it easier for employers to provide hands-on experience to students while helping them gain valuable job skills.

-MoDED – Ron Seyl

Ron Seyl commented that MoDED currently has the Neighborhood assistance program coming up.

-Community Foundation of the Ozarks – Alice Wingo/Joe Kammerer

Alice Wingo stated the Community Foundation of the Ozarks, in partnership with the Community Partnership of the Ozarks and United Way, surveyed nonprofits across southern Missouri to assess the impact of federal uncertainty. Key concerns include financial instability, program vulnerability, staffing challenges, and operational constraints.

With recent cuts affecting local food programs, they are prepared to deploy resources and collaborate to support impacted organizations. As part of these efforts, they are hosting our third annual Rural Philanthropy Summit on April 10-11, bringing together funders, rural community partners, and foundations to discuss how philanthropy can address unmet needs.

Member Updates

Renee Frazier with OATS Transit stated that the Area Agency on Aging is having funding restrictions, resulting in not being able to continue with their contract with OATS, for now. They are working on options in the SMCOG area, but in more rural counties, it is a struggle.

Roddy Roger with SW Water thanked the legislator for support of the water supply.

Carrissa with Farmers Market of the Ozarks started off stating that farmers markets throughout our region are doubling up food bucks, through SNAP at farmers markets for produce, which may possibly be cut. Funding cuts like these are affecting our local farmers.

Andrea Sitzes asked if the RLF financing is being frozen. She is asking this to see if they should wait to submit new applications

-Cindy stated yes to wait on submitting new applications. At the end of February, our time to grant new loans had ended, and any funds we had left were returned. Now we will need the revolving portion to start.

Adjourn

Next SMCOG Board Meeting will be held on Wednesday, May 28, 2025.

Steve Childers, Secretary

Date Approved