

**Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District**  
**Regular Meeting of the Board of Supervisors**  
**March 14, 2024 @ 3:00 pm**  
**UF/IFAS / 5339 Country Road 579 / Seffner FL / 33584**

**Supervisors and staff in attendance:** Ryan Gill (Chair, Seat 2); Adam Young (Vice Chair, Seat 3); Robert “Myke” Morris (Treasurer, Seat 4); Chris “Bear” McCullough (Seat 1); Mark Proctor (Seat 5); Tom Gonzalez (Counsel, HSWCD Board); Dr. Joe Walsh (HSWCD Executive Director); Linda Chion (HSWCD Staff).

*Note: Supervisor McCullough arrived 3:07 p.m.*

**Partner Agency and Vendor representatives in attendance:** Leslie Diaz-Alvarez (NRCS District Conservationist), Simon Bollin (Hillsborough Agriculture Economic Development), Amber Smith, senior government affairs regional manager, Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD)

**Public in attendance:** Betty Jo Tompkins (self)

*Items 1-5*

**Call to Order / Pledge of Allegiance/Introductions:** Chair Gill called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.; led the Pledge of Allegiance, welcomed attendees and asked for introductions.

**Public comment:** None

**Public correspondence:** none

*Item 6*

**Minutes of January 11, 2025 board meeting:** Supervisor Morris moved to accept minutes of February 8, 2024 and February 20, 2024. Supervisor Proctor seconded. Motion carries 5-0.

*Item 7*

**Financial Report:** Treasurer Morris reviews bank accounts, noting the Mini-Farms Account is the largest (\$61,768.48), with no recent transactions. Could not verify figures on Hillsborough 100 account as outstanding checks issued to 2023 Summer Poster Contest youth winners have not yet cleared. ED Walsh said he will work with HSWCD senior administrator on a better way to represent outstanding checks in monthly reports. Supervisor Young moved to accept treasurer’s report. Chair Gill seconded. Motion carries 4-0 with one abstention. *Note: Supervisor McCullough arrives after discussion and does not vote.*

## Items 8-10

### **Partner Agency Reports:**

- *SWFWMD Farms Program* — *Ken Griner, Jeff Whealton, Thomas Stevens* had been on the agenda, but ED Walsh said no one was available to speak. Amber Smith, who works in the SWFWMD Tampa office of SWFWMD, offered some cursory discussion. ED Walsh said SWFWMD is interested in the upcoming NRCS Local Working Group, facilitated by HSWCD.
- *Simon Bollin, Agribusiness Development Manager at Hillsborough County Extension Services*
  - AG Pesticide Collection held March 12 at the North Hillsborough Heights Collection Facility, open to farmers only. About 16,000 pounds of unused chemicals were collected. With a balance in funding through an EPC pollution two-year recovery grant (\$48,000), Bollin said it is likely a similar collection will be held next year.
  - Working with Blue Star Families to contact some 300 to 400 active MacDill Air Force Base families living with food insecurity led to a food collection that was to be distributed Tuesday, March 19, 2024. To the list of farmers who supported the drive, Supervisor McCullough added the Hillsborough Cattlemen Foundation.
  - Military Tour is sold out for Friday, April 5. Stops to include Cone Ranch, Fancy Farms and fish hatchery. Although Supervisor Morris agreed to sponsor a HART bus, HART was unable to fulfill the request. For future reference, it was clarified that HART could not provide a bus suitable to the rural driving conditions.
  - Next Ag Development Council meeting set for Tuesday, April 30, 2-4 p.m. at the Florida Strawberry Growers Association (FSGA) in Dover. Agenda is being set. Supervisor Morris asked for invitation and Simon said he will send invite to ED Walsh.
- *NRCS* — *Leslie Diaz-Alvarez, District Conservationist*, reported that NRCS had been extremely busy in recent weeks assessing farms (16 applications) for Farm Bill programs. Comment was made that proposed Cost Share position would be expected to assist in this activity when available in the future.

## Item 11

**Local Working Group:** Diaz-Alvarez is working with ED Walsh and Walter Albarran from NRCS on the upcoming Local Working Group meeting, scheduled for April 18. Presented by USDA/NRCS, in collaboration with HSWCD, the LWG aims to get local community input on funding priorities for agricultural operations and conservation practices. Leslie said HSWCD hosts the meeting, and she will be the speaker, aiming to get survey feedback from attendees, including producers

and ranchers. ED Walsh said 200 to 300 invites have been sent. Discussion about what, if any, refreshments to offer, preferably with sponsor donation, as no funds available. Noted that local interests do not have to be in attendance to fill out surveys, which aid need rankings. Supervisor Morris asked that instructions be included with surveys sent out. Leslie said findings will be sent to state technical committee. ED Walsh asked if a report of community findings would be sent back to the district. Leslie said she would look into that. Supervisor Proctor has a conflict for the LWG meeting.

Event Details: Local Working Group meeting, scheduled for April 18, 10 a.m. to noon, at the Florida Strawberry Growers Association (FSGA) event center in Dover, at 13138 Lewis Gallagher Road.

*Item 12*

**Request for Non-Agenda Items:** Regarding House Bill 7013 on special districts, the measure is enrolled and awaiting signature and takes effect July 1. Attorney Gonzalez added that he sees it as a minor victory for special districts. Attorney Gonzalez noted three items of interest, concerning term limits; the list of factors that can cause a district to be declared inactive. Most important, Gonzalez said, are two new reports that must be submitted concerning looking ahead and retroactively at project and performance objectives. Supervisor McCullough said the HSWCD has been very active and Chair Gill said accountability is good. Supervisor Proctor asked if a workshop and/or retreat in this regard would be good. Attorney Gonzalez said he believed that would be looked upon favorably. ED Walsh said he did not find it onerous at all, noting that the OPPAGA audit underway is a good opportunity to right the ship moving forward. Chair Gill said special district accountability has been lagging and this is a good way to put a feather in your hat.

*Item 13*

**Old Business**

**Director's Report:**

- Staff member Chion gave a update on HSWCD participation at the Florida State Fair (Feb. 8-19) and Florida Strawberry Festival (Feb. 29 to March 10). Booths were well-stocked and manned. Highlights included a farmer interview with Chair Gill at the state fair and the display of winning 2023 summer poster entries at the festival. Chair Gill said there was good activity at the booths at both events.
- Form 1 Financial Disclosure document for supervisors was discussed.
- *OPPAGA Update* — ED Walsh said he, Chair Gill and Attorney Gonzalez participated in conference call with auditors. ED Walsh discussed the issue of special versus independent district, noting HSWCD operations are funded by the county. He also is going through records to determine what might be missing. Meanwhile, annual year in review reports will give testament to how clearly active the district has been in its operations. He noted the emphasis moving forward, including for grants, will be on

“dollars for dirt.” After a short recess, discussion of district status ensued, as it relates to filing. Attorney Gonzalez said no opinion has yet been given. Supervisor Morris said further clarification is needed. OPPAGA will characterize what they see.

- *Audit 2023 Update* — ED Walsh said he spoke to the CPA, who said he had taken a cursory look at delivered documents and would get back to the district should he find something missing. Concerns were raised as to how quickly the audit was going to be done to which ED Walsh pointed out that the deadline is not until June 30. Supervisor Gill said to call back in two weeks if no word has been received from CPA. ED Walsh said his future performance goal is to have annual audit documents presented to the CPA no later than November, with a goal of having filed with the state by January 1.
- *Bonding Insurance Update* — ED Walsh reiterated that each person who is authorized to make transactions on behalf of the board must be bonded. The cost is \$100 per year per person for \$10,000 worth of coverage. Supervisor Gill asked if it is worth having a third signature. Supervisor Morris said three signers allows for greater availability and convenience. Attorney Gonzalez said in his experience, \$30,000 is fine. Supervisor Morris moved to bond three signers on the account — Chair Gill, Supervisor Morris and ED Walsh. Supervisor Proctor seconded. In discussion, Chair Gill gets clarity that \$10,000 is the minimum policy. ED Walsh said cost can be taken out of county budget via admin P-Card. Motion carries 5-0.  
SECOND MOTION: Supervisor Morris moved to remove Supervisor Proctor as a signer on the SouthState accounts, with a letter to be drafted and sent to SouthState Bank. Supervisor Proctor seconds the motion. Motion carries 5-0.
- *FDACS Coordination* — ED Walsh gives greater clarification about FDACS’ requested amendment to take \$100,000 out of pass-through money in the HSWCD account to benefit projects needed elsewhere in the state. The current three-year contract ends June 30 and the \$100,000 has not been earmarked for local projects. ED Walsh said FDACS needs money for a massive project and is pulling funds from as many districts as possible. ED Walsh said moving forward, with FDACS and Tallahassee, HSWCD could get back to its normal three-year contract of \$450,000. Supervisor Young asked when FDACS contract negotiations would ensue, given the new contract would start July 1. Supervisor Young moved to allow ED Walsh or Chair Gill to sign the new amendment to the FDACS contract when it comes through clean, to have HSWCD allocation reduced by \$100,000. Supervisor Morris seconded. Motion carries 5-0.
- *4503 Coronet Road Transition* — ED Walsh said he and Senior Admin Eckdahl supervised the moving of HSWCD items from South Collins Street (old office) to Coronet Road (new office). The alarm system is working; IT drops not yet completed. No phones. Had expected to be relocated in March, now likely in April. Address has been changed to new location and mail is being held for pickup. Official phone number has been assigned and old keys and FOBs will be delivered to FSA. Chair Gill said he will be very ecstatic when all

is done, as the move has been a long time coming.

- *Business Cards* — Supervisors were given business card forms to fill out. Supervisor Morris moved to adopt logo that's on the agenda and that the staff should use the official logo on business cards. Motion seconded by Supervisor Young. Motion carried 5-0.
- Form 1 Financial Disclosure document for supervisors.

#### *Item 14*

##### **New Business:**

- *Technician position* — ED Walsh discussed cost-share agreement with NRCS (Albarran) concerning a 50-50 agreement to pay for the cost of a technician salary in the high 40's to low 50's. Supervisor McCullough and NRCS Rep Diaz-Alvarez commented that the Salary needed to be up in the \$60K range. Supervisor McCulough would follow up with County Senior management to amend the starting salary. ED Walsh to follow up.
- ED Walsh reported that program reps recently reached out looking for HSCWD participation in AgVenture and Envirothon.
- *Records retrieval* — ED Walsh reported some records were received from former HSWCD ED Betty Jo Tompkins. Attorney Gonzalez asked ED Walsh if records were comprehensive for what she had. ED Walsh said he needs more time to make that assessment.

#### *Item 15*

##### **Upcoming Events, Board Meeting Scheduling**

- Local Working Group Meeting  
April 18, 10 a.m. to noon  
Florida Strawberry Growers Association  
13138 Lewis Gallagher Road, Dover
- Next board meeting, May 23 at 3 p.m.  
Location to be determined.

#### *Item 16*

##### **Meeting Adjournment:**

- Chair Gill moves to adjourn meeting at 4:49 p.m.