

Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District Meeting of the Board of Supervisors

May 12, 2025 @ 10:00 AM

Location: HSWCD Office/4503 Coronet Rd/Plant City/FL/33566

Supervisors and staff in attendance: Terri Parke (Seat 1), Betty Jo Tompkins (Seat 2), Gretchen Hoke (Seat 3), and Aly Sullivan (Seat 5); Special Counsel Tom Gonzalez; Dr. Joe Walsh (Executive Director); K. Eckdahl (Office Manager)

Absent: Absent/Vacant (Seat 4)

Items 1-4

1.-4. Call to Order / Pledge of Allegiance/Introductions: Chair Parke called the meeting to order at 10:00 A.M.; led the Pledge of Allegiance; Vice Chair Hoke led the prayer; Chair Parke welcomed attendees; and asked for introductions.

Partner Agency and Vendor Representatives in Attendance: video-conference attendees – Simon Bollin, Hillsborough County Agribusiness Development; Ken Griner, SWFWMD-FARMS; Troy Green, HCBOCC-Div Env. Mgt.; Vanessa Bauzo-DeLeon, FDACS-OAWP Env. Consultant; Mona Neville, FDACS – County Forester; Margie Martin and Celeste McLaughlin, Martin Communications.

Public in Attendance: video-conference attendee: Christian Padgett, (Chapter President, FNGLA)

Item 5. Public Comment: None at this time.

Item 6. Public Correspondence: None at this time.

Item 7. Review and Approval of Agenda: Supervisor Tompkins moved to accept the agenda for May 12, 2025. Supervisor Sullivan seconded. Motion carried: 4-0.

Item 8. Legislative Update, SB 986 and HB 973: Dr. Walsh reported that he had received email notification dated May 6th, 2025, that SB 986 had been indefinitely postponed and withdrawn from consideration. He noted that the companion bill HB 973 had not been withdrawn, and that the Board should not get complacent. This situation provides only “breathing room” for the Conservation District to continue working toward proving our intention of developing and delivering technical services for FY 2026.

Item 9. Partner Agencies (introductions and reports):

- a. FDACS – Vanessa Bauzo-DeLeon briefed the Board on the proposed rule change for the Alafia River Basin Management Action Plan (“BMAP”), scheduled to go into effect on July 1st, 2025. She noted that the smaller watershed BMAPs falling within the Alafia watershed are being consolidated to this plan and the boundary expanded to incorporate the entire Alafia River watershed.
- b. SWFWMD Intergovernmental Affairs – no report at this time.
- c. SWFWMD FARMS Program Group – *Ken Griner* provided an overview of the Farms program Cost

Share reimbursement dollars with special mention of the Mini-Farms option. Mini-Farms is best suited to smaller farms (one example noted was 10 acres in size), has a \$10,000 per project limit, with a per customer/property-limit of 5 projects in a lifetime, and a pace of 2 project maximum per year. Ken encouraged participation in the SWFWMD programs.

- d. Hillsborough Agri-business Development – *Simon Bollin* indicated no news to report at this time.

Item 10. Minutes of April 14, 2025, HSWCD Regular Board Meeting: The Board’s meeting minutes from April 14, 2025, were presented. Supervisor Sullivan moved to accept the meeting minutes as presented. Supervisor Hoke seconded. Motion carried: 4-0.

Item 11. Financial Report for April 2025: The April 2025 Financial report and bank statement were reviewed. Chair Parke noted that the reimbursement for the art print (raffle prize for FSGA’s Agri-Tech Conference) did not appear on the report. Ms. Eckdahl indicated that particular transaction would appear on next month’s report. Treasurer Hoke moved to accept and file the April 2025 Financial Report and Bank Statements for audit. Supervisor Sullivan seconded. Motion carried: 4-0.

Item 12. Supervisor Announcements:

- a. **Supervisor Parke:** reported sending a letter to the Commissioner Simpson (of Agriculture) requesting the Commissioner’s active support toward removing the HSWCD from the SB-986/HB-973 dissolution lists. She attended the Cattlemen’s Association Dinner, as an invited speaker and spoke on the issue of SB 986/HB-973, noting the District’s recent accomplishments and asking for active support of the Cattlemen membership in advocating for removal of the Conservation District from the dissolution lists. Lastly, Chair Parke mentioned her intention to participate in the FSGA Agri-Tech conference, to assist with the District’s booth/Local Working Group survey.
- b. **Vice Chair Hoke:** reported she had hand-delivered Chair Parke’s letter to the Commissioner of Ag, while she was in Tallahassee for Florida Wildlife Corridor Day at the State Capital. She also met with Representative Alvarez on this issue while she was there. Supervisor Hoke had very productive/positive networking opportunities by attending the unveiling of the Florida Wildlife Corridor Mural at the RP Center in Lakeland (Dr. Walsh joined her there).
- c. **Supervisor Tompkins:** reported she was an exhibitor at the EPC’s Clean Air Fair in Tampa. She reported she had recently started collaborating with certain supervisors from a few other districts to organize an alternative to the Florida Assoc. of Conservation Districts; and attended the recent Tampa Bay Beekeepers Association meeting, which focused on pollinator issues.
- d. **Supervisor Sullivan:** reported she participated in the recent Cattlemen’s Association Clay Shoot Event.

Item 13. Director’s Report:

- Dr. Walsh reported the District’s lease for 4503 Coronet Rd as being fully executed by Hillsborough

County.

- The NRCS now has security privileges to the building and garage bays where NRCS is now storing their trailered utility terrain vehicle (UTV); NRCS Chuck Bailey is the primary operator.
- Dr. Walsh reported a recent farm site visit, shadowing the USDA/NRCS District Conservationist, with more site visits in the works.
- He had several meetings with County emergency management coordinators, toward establishing a role for the Conservation District in pre and post hurricane activities within the County's rural areas; he noted that reception to his offer is positive, with various County managers acknowledging that they did not have enough resources to reach both urban service areas and rural areas equitably in terms of response times in the aftermath of hurricanes Helene and Milton. He also noted that some of the opportunities aligned well with skill sets and activities we had been discussing for adoption into the District's annual work plan for FY 2026; examples being drone-collected data from site visits, and flooded properties.
- Lastly, he noted that the District's Chapters 10- and 50-required legal ads for 2025 are being published this month in Tampa Bay Times and In the Field Magazine (ITFM).

Item 14. Old Business:

- **Supervisor Tompkins' Qualification to serve office of Supervisor** (*Chair Parke with assistance of Special Counsel Tom Gonzalez*): Supervisor Tompkins presented to the Board a text summary of her agriculture-related experiences dating back to the 1970's, in support of her assertion that she qualified to serve as a Supervisor on the Board. Special Council Tom Gonzalez addressed to Supervisor Tompkins that he saw no financial documents from an agricultural production business, no proof of ownership of a qualifying "Green-belted" property, nor even her voter registration card. He further noted that none of the experiences [she listed] appeared to be verifiable nor even met the definition of agricultural production as required under FL Chapter 582. Supervisor Tompkins provided a summary of work history (see attachment A).
 - a. Chair Parke requested that the qualifications under FL Statute 582 be read out loud. Dr. Walsh read the qualifications directly from Florida Statutes (2024), section 582.19, as follows:
 - The governing body of the district shall consist of five supervisors, elected as provided in s. 582.18.
 - To qualify to serve on the governing body of a district, a supervisor must be an eligible voter who resides in the district and who:
 - Is actively engaged in, or retired after 10 years of being engaged in, agriculture as defined in s. 570.02;
 - Is employed by an agricultural producer; or
 - Owns, leases or is actively employed on land classified as agricultural under s. 193.461.
 - b. Special Council Gonzalez opined to the Chair that Supervisor Tompkins had failed to provide substantive proof of her qualification.
 - c. At the request of the Chair to recommend appropriate action, Special Counsel made the following suggestions:
 - i. the Board to have a letter prepared to the appropriate authority (addressee to-be-determined by Special Counsel and Dr. Walsh).
 - ii. Draft the letter as a referral of Supervisor Tompkins' to the appropriate administrative review authority, for consideration of removal from office. The letter should indicate that Supervisor Tompkins failed to provide constructive evidence of her qualification to serve the office per agreement with the Board to do so by May 12th, 2025 Board meeting; also noting that this request stems from public comment at the February Board meeting, demanding substantiation of her qualification by a

member of the electorate (Mrs. Deborah Hunt, Durant area), after failing to find any records available to the public that support Supervisor Tompkins' Affidavit of Agricultural qualification.

- iii. The letter should be presented to the Board for action at the June 16th regular Board meeting.
 - iv. Counsel recommended that adequate notice to the Public be made of the next meeting, so that constituents could be aware of the opportunity to address the Board. Public comment period should be properly allowed for on the June 16th agenda.
- d. Vice Chair Hoke moved to have a letter drafted for presentation at the June 16th, 2025 Board meeting for consideration of further action by the Board; the letter is to refer Supervisor Tompkins to appropriate authority for review of her qualification and possible removal from office. Supervisor Sullivan seconded. Motion carried 3-1, with Supervisors Parke, Hoke and Sullivan voting "yea" and Supervisor Tompkins voting "nay".

Item 15: Upcoming/Proposed Business Schedule: Upcoming event dates were reviewed.

Adjournment: Chair Parke adjourned the meeting 10:41 AM

Next Board Meeting:

June 16, 2025 @ 10 AM

HSWCD Office 4503 Coronet Rd/Plant City/FL 33566