

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

**March 9, 2026**

**Location: HSWCD Office / 4503 Coronet Road, Plant City, FL 33566**

**Board Supervisors in attendance:** Terri Parke (Seat 1); Casey Runkles (Seat 4); Gretchen Hoke (Seat 3, *virtually, via teams*); Betty Jo Tompkins (Seat 2, *virtually, via telephone*)

**Staff Support:** Dr Joe Walsh (Executive Director); Dawn Chancey (Office Manager); Emily Bruce (Land Conservation Specialist, *virtually, via teams*); Special Counsel Tom Gonzalez (*virtually, via teams*).

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

**Partner Agency and Vendor Representation in Attendance:** *In person* - Simon Bolin (Hillsborough County Agribusiness Development/AEDC); Andrew Kears (USDA/NRCS – District Conservationist); Ken Griner (SWFWMD – Environmental Engineer, FARMS; *virtually, via teams*); Troy Green (Hillsborough County Environmental – Water Quality Issues; *virtually, via teams*).

**Public in Attendance:** Matt Shivers, JM Farms.

**Item 5. Public Comment:** None requested at this meeting.

**Item 6 Public Correspondence:** None presented at this meeting.

**Item 7 Review and Approval of Agenda:** Chair Parke opened discussion for review and approval of the agenda.

**Non agenda item introduced by Supervisor Runkles** – issue of SWFWMD letters going to Strawberry growers connecting dry well complaints to freeze protection measures. Supervisor Runkles made a motion to accept the agenda with the addition of the non-agenda item; Supervisor Hoke seconded the motion; motion carried 4-0; item appears as number 13 in the minutes.

**Item 8 Minutes of the February 16<sup>th</sup> Regular Board:** Dawn Chancey presented the draft minutes for the February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2026, Board meeting; Supervisor Runkles made a Motion to accept the meeting minutes; Supervisor Tompkins seconded the motion. Motion carried 4-0.

**Item 9 Financial Report for February 2026:** Dawn Chancey presented the February 2026 Financial report; Vice-Chair Hoke stated that she had reviewed the draft report with Dawn in advance of the meeting and did not have any questions. Supervisor Hoke motioned to accept the February 2026 bank statements and reconciliation; Supervisor Tompkins seconded the motion; Motion carried 4-0.

Dawn Chancey advised she is currently working on an updated format for the monthly reconciliation report and will have it ready to present at the April Regular Meeting.

**Item 10. Review Application and appoint for Board Seat 5:** Chair Parke opened this item commenting that the board had interviewed two candidates for appointment to Board Seat 5 during the February 16<sup>th</sup> Regular Board meeting, and voted to appoint Matt Shivers to fill Board Seat 5. However, Special Counsel subsequently advised that the board had failed to provide for an appropriate public input period; hence, staff was directed to notice the public of Matt Shivers' nomination for the remainder of days between the initial notice and today's date. No additional comments were received from the public in that time; consequently, Chair Parke called for the motion to appoint Matt Shivers to Seat 5 and open for discussion. Supervisor Runkles moved to appoint Matt Shivers to Seat 5; Co-Chair Hoke seconded the motion; Motion carried 4-0.

**Item 11 Partner Agency Reports:**

- *USDA/NRCS, District Conservationist Andrew Kearse:*
  - currently NRCS-Plant City office has a total of 118 cost-share applications in queue and 52 active contracts. Over the next few weeks, Marco Loperena from the Kissimmee office will be assisting Andrew with field visits to confirm the applicants' resource concerns and identify appropriate conservation practices.

- Andrew provided a timeline for the project starting with July 31, 2026, as the RCPP-LMR Projects 1924 & 2817 application deadline through August 28, 2026, as the deadline for NRCS obligations.
  - Conservation Planner Trainings: NRCS offered the District a space in the upcoming Pasture Condition Score Training, 3/11 and 3/12 in Gainesville
  - 2026 Annual Local Working Group- Andrew is working closely with Dr. Walsh to schedule the meeting and the new format for the resources of concern survey is forthcoming. Dr. Walsh stated that we are aiming for an April 20<sup>th</sup> venue between 2:00pm – 5:00pm, and proposing the Florida Strawberry Growers Association office in Dover, FL.
- *Hillsborough County Environmental – Water Quality – Troy Green:* Troy had no new activity to share and asked if there is any near future opportunity for collaboration with regard to water quality issues. His division primarily seeks to solve impaired water issues throughout the whole county, and they have struggled historically in reaching some of the more rural/agricultural areas. Dr. Walsh reminded the Board that the original context of their acquaintance with Troy was his presentation on the 2025 FDEP ruling for the Alafia BMP. Dr. Walsh requested that Troy make plans to attend our Local Working Group on April 20<sup>th</sup> and consider presenting again this year for that event.
  - *SWFWMD – Environmental Engineer, FARMS – Ken Griner:*
    - Ken advised that Jeff Whealton, Agricultural Programs Manager, could not participate in today’s meeting.
    - Ken offered a summary of the SWFWMD-FARMS program, highlighting their favorite cost-share items such as irrigation system weather stations and moisture probes. They also contribute to tubular recovery ponds, the pump stations the pump filters, and the main line that goes out to the manifolds. They currently have a lot of strawberry projects under funding. As always, if anyone knows of someone wanting to participate in FARMS cost-shares, please send them Ken’s contact information.
  - *Hillsborough County Agribusiness Development/AECD/Cooperative Extension Service – Simon Bolin:*

- Next AECD meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 10<sup>th</sup> from 2:00pm – 4:00pm. This next agenda has only 2 topics: Fire Marshall regarding fire codes for farmworker housing and the Planning Commission’s presentation on the urban service boundary expansion study.
- The next Blue Star event is scheduled for 3/26. There will be approximately 550 families from MacDill and 350 St. Pete Coast Guard station. If the District knows of anyone who would like to donate please put them in touch with Simon.

**Item 12. Legal Item: Retain services of Donna V. Smith, PLLC to conduct an investigation of a confidential matter with a rate of \$275 per hour / capped at \$4500:** Special Counsel Gonzalez reintroduced the matter of a confidential legal investigation previously presented at the March 9th regular Board meeting. On March 9<sup>th</sup>, the Board had unanimously voted to refer the issue back to Hillsborough County Attorney’s Office under the pretext that unless the County divulged the nature of request it was the County Attorney’s problem. Hillsborough County has since denied that request. Special Counsel advised that not only is the board the steward of the money needed to pay for the request, but the board also is the employer of record with regard to the issue at hand and hence, has the legal obligation to look into such complaints in a timely manner.

Chair Parke followed Special Counsel’s comments noting that until the Board votes to approve this item, it will continue to appear on the monthly agenda indefinitely. Chair Parke made the motion to retain the services of Donna V. Smith to investigate. Supervisor Runkles seconded the motion; motion carried 4-1; Supervisor Tompkins voted nay.

**Item 13. Non Agenda Item: Request Dr. Walsh to send a letter to SWFWMD asking/suggesting transparency with the methodology used to determine who/which farms are responsible for mitigations or fines relating offsite dry well reports to their freeze protection water usage:** Supervisor Runkles made the motion and requested that we direct Dr. Walsh to draft and send a letter to Southwest Florida Water Management District requesting transparency and clarification regarding their methodology for determining potential well dry-up and potable use mitigation, as well as how water use permits are being evaluated and assigned. The

letter should specifically seek detailed explanation of the criteria, data, and processes being used. Chair Parke seconded the motion; motion carried 5-0.

#### **Item 14: Supervisor Announcements:**

##### **Chair Parke:**

- Attended the Florida Strawberry Festival Parade Day luncheon in role as Supervisor.
- Otherwise, spent a large amount of her time working the Parkesdale Family Farm booth at the Florida Strawberry Festival.

##### **Supervisor Hoke:**

- Supervisor Hoke would first like to say thank you to Chair Parke and Supervisor Runkles and any one else that has volunteered at the Florida Strawberry Festival over the past 11 days.
- Attended the NRCS Board and Technical Committee meeting.
- Participated in the prescribed Fire Festival. Supervisor Hoke highlighted the importance of prescribed fire for land management and healthy good [plant] systems.
- Participated in the most recent Corridor Connect Webinar linking land, people and purpose for the connected corridor.
- Participated in Agri-Fest in Polk County.

##### **Supervisor Tompkins:**

- Attended the Champion of Champions Dinner at the Florida State Fair.
- Attended the Commissioner of Agriculture's Breakfast at the Florida Strawberry Festival.
- Continues to work on her Florida Conservation Coalition's mini grant program.

##### **Supervisor Runkles:**

- Attended the AEDC Meeting
- Attended the Florida Strawberry Festival Parade Day Luncheon
- Volunteered at the Florida Strawberry Festival for several days.

## **Item 14. Executive Director's Report:**

- a) FDACS/OAWP Inquiry: On February 19th, we received a letter stating that we were administratively dissolved under a condition in Chapter 582 requiring all five Board members to meet at least once during the previous calendar year. As everyone is aware, we have been dealing with vacancies—first in Seat One, and then in the seat now filled by Matt Shivers. Dr. Walsh was able to show that for one meeting, September 2025, we technically had all five seat members participate in that meeting - Casey Runkles was appointed to her seat on that date and participated in the agenda, while Aly Sullivan also was participating. We provided a copy of the September 2025 meeting minutes to West Gregory, FDACS-OAWP Director, who accepted that document to meet the statutory requirement for 2025.
- b) HCBOCC Budget Book Pages: The District is obligated to submit its contribution to this public relations report, which outlines how County taxpayer dollars have been spent; Dr. Walsh noted this is the document that Supervisor Tompkins frequently refers to as our “annual report.” The submission is due on Friday, March 13th, 2026. Dr. Walsh has highlighted in yellow the text and photos he proposes to submit. He is requesting that all Board members review the materials and advise him of any corrections that may be needed in the next 2 days so that he can meet the deadline.
- c) JLAC Inquiry: Dr. Walsh presented a draft response to the JLAC letter dated January 15, 2026, regarding repeat audit findings and the status of corrective actions taken in response to the FY 2023–2024 audit report, as well as the two preceding audit reports. The draft response affirms that all issues identified in previous audits have been fully resolved. Dr. Walsh requested authorization from the Board to finalize and submit the response letter to JLAC. Chair Parke moved to approve the response letter and to grant Dr. Walsh permission to execute and submit it. Supervisor Tompkins seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 5–0.
- d) NRCS Comment Period: NRCS has requested input from participating agents serving on their Technical Advisory Committee. In response, Dr. Walsh has sought feedback from our constituents by publishing the report on Facebook, our website, and through email distribution. To date, no public comments have been received. Board members are asked to review the report and provide any feedback they may have. Once Board input is received, the consolidated comments will be submitted to the NRCS. If possible, we need any feedback by March 25<sup>th</sup> so we can submit to NRCS by March 27<sup>th</sup>.
- e) Local Working Group: We are working toward an April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2026 venue for this event, which will be held immediately following the regular Board

meeting scheduled for that morning. The event will take place at the Florida Strawberry Growers Association building from approximately 1:30pm to 5:00pm. Dr. Walsh and Andrew Kearce are working closely together on the survey in preparation for this event. Following this event, we will be able to complete the remaining outreach at the Agritech Tradeshow on May 5-6, 2026.

- f) Conservation Tech Position Update: Dr. Walsh advised that we are currently interviewing for this position. Chair Parke and Supervisor Shivers will be sitting on the interview panel with Dr. Walsh. We hope to have a candidate selected very soon.
- g) Office Painting: Dawn Chancey and Dr. Walsh had a conversation with Procurement and has received the green light to begin collecting quotes. Dawn has been inviting contractors for site visits for that purpose.

#### **Item 15: Upcoming Events:**

- April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2026: Hillsborough County Cattlemen's Dinner. Dr. Walsh is on that meeting agenda as an invited speaker.
- April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2026: Regular Board Meeting / Local Working Group
- May 5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup>, 2026: FSGA AgriTech Tradeshow

Meeting Adjourned at 11:15am.