



Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District

4503 Coronet Road
Plant City, FL 33566
(813) 707-1652
SoilandWater@HCFL.GOV

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Terri Parke, Seat 1
Elizabeth Tompkins, Seat 2
Gretchen Hoke, Seat 3
Casey Runkles, Seat 4
Vacant, Seat 5

Executive Director

Joseph Walsh, Ph.D.

November 17th, 2025

FROM: Joseph Walsh, Executive Director
TO: Board of Supervisors
Hillsborough Soil & Water Conservation District

RE: Report to the Board of Supervisors, Fact Finding regarding Supervisor Betty Jo Tompkins' Qualification to serve Office

Dear Board Members:

Please accept this summary report on the due diligence activity that you directed me to conduct at your February 10th, 2025, board meeting, toward substantiating Supervisor Tompkins' qualifications to serve office. This direction was motivated by a public comment to the Board on that date, from Mrs. Debbie Hunt, who is a member of the Board's electorate, is a rural land property owner in the Durant area and identified herself as a member of the nonprofit Citizens Defending Freedom. Mrs. Hunt stated that after the 2024 regular election she had been unable to find any evidence suggesting that Supervisor Tompkins was qualified to serve office according to the qualifications identified under Chapter 582, F.S.

Thereafter, I conducted my own search of public records on Florida Sunbiz and the property appraiser's website as well as information generally available on the internet. I also contacted long-standing recognized leaders in the agricultural community for anecdotal information of Mrs. Tompkins' agricultural activities. I was able to establish a timeline in Hillsborough County dating back to 1975 through the property records, which generally agrees with stories that Mrs. Tompkins has freely shared about her personal and professional life.

Mrs. Tompkins has maintained a very public profile in Hillsborough County dating back to the 1970s, which includes employment with nonprofits as well as this special district; volunteerism with many nonprofit community organizations; her previous tenure serving

as a supervisor on this Board before the current qualifications went into effect; and even having registered her candidacy for other publicly elected offices. Hence, there were people available who are very familiar with Mrs. Tompkins' public service, as well as the extent to which she can claim a background in agricultural production. Please note that while I did not receive permission to publicize the names of those individuals I spoke with, the group included people who have known Mrs. Tompkins dating back to the 1970s.

The group included members of the Florida Farm Bureau, Florida Strawberry Growers Association, Hillsborough Chapter of the Florida Cattlemen's Association, and the Plant City Chamber of Commerce, with backgrounds in agricultural production and commercial real estate, as well as government workers from various agricultural and natural resources management units. I also spoke with officers of the Tampa Bay Beekeepers Association, although their knowledge of Mrs. Tompkins seemed to be limited to more recent years. While there was consensus that Mrs. Tompkins was not qualified to serve the office, and not one person was willing to substantiate any qualification on her behalf, there also was a palpable hesitancy to step forward publicly on this issue.

On Jun 12th, 2024, Elizabeth P. Tompkins filed a signed affidavit with the Hillsborough County Supervisor of Elections that she was qualified under section 582.19(1), Florida Statutes to serve on the governing body of the Soil and Water Conservation District (Attachment A).

On May 12th, 2025, Mrs. Tompkins presented an undated list of activities to this Board, in support of her affidavit of qualification (Attachment B). The list was not supported by any documentation that would substantiate either her history of agricultural production per Chapter 570 F.S., employment with a producer qualified under chapter 570, F.S, or current ownership of agricultural lands pursuant to Chapter 193 F.S. The Board resolved by a majority vote to refer Mrs. Tompkins' qualifications for review by a higher authority in Tallahassee for "possible removal from office" with the circumstance being a charge of malfeasance for filing a false affidavit.

On June 30th, 2025, the Board adopted a motion to send a letter (dated June 30th, 2025) addressed to the Office of the Commissioner of Agriculture. Shortly thereafter, the Commissioner's office contacted me, redirecting this action to the Governor's Office, consistent with Chapter 582. I reported this referral of action to the Board at its regular meeting on July 21st, 2025.

On August 26th, 2025, in continuance of the May 12th, 2025, Board motion, a letter was sent to the Office of General Counsel, Executive Office of the Governor, with public records attached, for consideration of the matter. Informal consultations with that office occurred by phone with Mr. Chris Kimball, a Senior Assistant Counsel in that office, and the Board's Special Counsel, Tom Gonzalez, participating. Mr. Kimball recognized that the issue of Mrs. Tompkins qualification had merit but also recommended that we continue with fact-finding.

Mr. Kimball identified Mrs. Tompkins' claim of having been a beekeeper for many years as the only activity on her list that qualified her for service, since it is listed under Chapter 570, F.S., and instructed that the timeframe of that activity had to be documentable, or credibly refuted, to settle the issue to the satisfaction of the Governor's Office. Lastly, he suggested that the Board consider making a formal resolution referring Supervisor Tompkins to the Governor's Office for removal from her elected office.

On October 28th, 2025, I was informed by a senior official at Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), that Supervisor Elizabeth "Betty Jo" Tompkins' claim on beekeeping as her agricultural qualification to serve office under F.S. 582 could easily be verified or refuted, since it is a regulated activity under Chapter 586, F.S and Rule 54-5B, Florida Administrative Code. I was advised that the Division of Plant Industry maintains all records of registered beekeepers and the annually required inspection certificates for all hives.

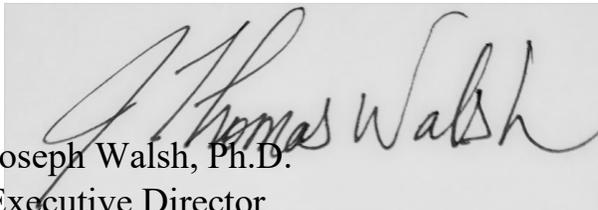
The practice of beekeeping has been monitored under State of Florida regulations for 100 years, and the regulations apply to all honeybee-keepers regardless of whether they are hobbyists or keeping bees for income. In the State of Florida, *it is illegal to keep unregistered honeybees for any purpose* under F.S. 586, and all beekeepers must be registered and ensure that the health of their beehives is certified yearly by an inspector under Rule 54-5B, F.A.C.

On October 29th, 2025, this office made a public records request for a review of FDACS' beekeeper registry (Attachment C). We provided the department with all known aliases for Mrs. Tompkins (including her maiden name of Padron), as she has presented herself on property records, Sunbiz records, documents of this special district, and various other public profiles.

On November 3rd, 2025, FDACS sent its response to the effect that there is no history of Mrs. Tompkins ever having registered as a beekeeper (Attachment D). In effect, Mrs. Tompkins' claim of qualification to serve the office of Supervisor under Chapters 570, 582, and 586, F.S. has been proven in the negative as a matter of State record.

I have consulted with the Board's Special Counsel, Tom Gonzalez, on these findings. It is our shared opinion that Mrs. Tompkins is not qualified to hold the office of supervisor of a soil and water district constituted pursuant to Fla. Stat. Chap. 582 because she does not meet the requirements imposed by law for that office. It is our further recommendation that if the Board agrees with our findings that it move to adopt a resolution calling upon the Governor to remove Mrs. Elizabeth "Betty Jo" Tompkins from her office as Supervisor, Seat 2, Board of Supervisors, Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District, on the basis that she is not qualified to serve the office and filed a false affidavit ahead of the 2024 regular election, stating that she was.

On the advice of Special Counsel, I also recommend that the Board consider a motion to hold either a special meeting for the purpose of making such resolution or scheduling the item for your next regular meeting in December, after you have had ample time to publish the agenda for public notice.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph Walsh". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Joseph Walsh, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Attachments: A through D (4)

STATE OF FLORIDA

COUNTY OF Hillsborough

I, Elizabeth P. Tompkins a candidate for Supervisor of Soil and Water Conservation District, meet the qualifications pursuant to section 582.19(1), Florida Statutes, to serve on the governing body of the Soil and Water Conservation District.

- I am an eligible voter who resides in the district, and (select at least one of the following):
- I am actively engaged in, or retired after 10 years of being engaged in, agriculture as defined in s. 570.02 Florida Statutes
- I am employed by an agricultural producer
- I own, lease, or am actively employed on land classified as agriculture under s.193.461 Florida Statutes

Elizabeth P. Tompkins
Signature of Candidate

Address Line 1: 1706 South Kings Avenue

Address Line 2: mailing Address: Post Office Box 888, Brandon, FL 33509

City: Brandon

State: Fl. Florida

Zip Code: 33511

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 12 day of June

at Hillsborough County Florida

Emily Popson

Produced Identification; FL DL



Betty Jo Tompkins
Post Office Box 888 * Brandon, Florida 33509

Agricultural Background

Avid beekeeper since youth, raising bees for honey and pollination. Selected as Florida Honey Queen and traveled representing the apiary and honey industries. Maintained hives until destroyed in hurricane Milton. Current multi-year member of Tampa Bay Beekeepers Association, as well as former member of the Florida Beekeepers Association.

Previous owner (with family) of forestry land in Santa Rosa county. Florida;

Previous owner/operator of organic certification business, certifying agricultural lands throughout Florida for purposes of organic crop production. Closed business (which had been registered with FDACS), when federal government changed rules to require certifiers to operate in all states, rather than a single state. This change resulted in about 85+ percent of these businesses closing nationally.

Previous owner/operator of business providing heirloom citrus for fundraising to schools in multiple states. Closed business after previous hurricane destroyed groves.

Previous Executive Director of Hillsborough County Farm Bureau. At the time the youngest Executive Director in the state and the only female Executive Director of a county Farm Bureau in Florida.

- ***Member of Florida Farm Bureau and Hillsborough County Farm Bureau since the 1970's with "active agriculture" classification.***

Previous Chairperson, Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District

- ***Multi-year elected Supervisor of Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District.***
- ***Involved with Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District over forty years, as my husband was Supervisor and Chair, and my son also held both positions.***

- ***Served as President of the State Auxiliary of previous state conservation association, as well as active in Association of Florida Conservation Districts.***
- ***Director of the newly formed state association of conservation districts.***

Previous Executive Director of Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District

- ***Previous President of Florida Conservation Districts Employees Association.***

National Association of Conservation Districts

- ***Named to the SE NACD Conservation Hall of Fame.***
- ***Lifetime Member of "Friends of NACD".***
- ***Presenter at multiple NACD national conventions.***

Florida Conservation Coalition, Inc. – *"Advocating, Educating and Facilitating Conservation Programs for Youth and Adults"*.

- ***Current Association President. Programs include sponsorship of countywide mini-grant conservation scholarships for programs, projects and activities by inner-city, urban, suburban and rural youth groups.***

Hillsborough County Fair

- ***Past President and current Executive Board member.***
- ***Coordinator of annual fair Plant Auction, display areas, youth horticulture show, rain barrel decorating contest and agricultural art area.***
- ***Recipient of Lifetime Achievement Harvest Award & current co-chair.***
- ***Coordinator of agriculturally related areas at "Catch the Spirit & Celebrate America" County Fair 4th of July event.***

Other Fairs & Ag Related Events

- ***Having involvement with activities (exhibits, etc.) related to Florida State Fair, Florida Strawberry Festival, Greater Gainesville Fair, North Florida Fair (Tallahassee) and Dade County Youth Fair.***
- ***Multi-year exhibitor at EPC Clean Air Fair and the Florida Ag Expo.***

- ***National Scholarship winner and participant in first Urban Ag Expo in Detroit, Michigan - 2024.***

Other Related Activities

4-H Program

- ***Lifelong member of 4-H as a youth (state winner of National 4-H Congress, National 4-H Conference and State officer).***
- ***One of six selected nationally to work for the National 4-H Foundation.***
- ***Multi-year 4-H leader, as well as leader/coordinator of 4-H Exchange Club that traveled during different summers to rural communities in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Arizona and Colorado.***
- ***President and current Board member of Hillsborough County 4-H Foundation.***
- ***Creator (and continued participant) of the annual 4-H Strawberry U=Pick at Fancy Farms that has been the largest single local 4-H funding source for almost twenty consecutive years.***
- ***Past President, Florida 4-H Foundation.***
- ***Named to the Florida 4-H Hall of Fame and named state Lifetime Achievement award recipient from UF IFAS/Extension for 4-H work.***

Rotary

- ***District Governor 2001-2002 for Rotary International District 6890. At the time one of less than ten females serving as a Governor out of approximately 530 Governors worldwide.***
- ***Have held offices, including President, of my current club for almost thirty years.***
- ***Former team leader to India with Rotary International.***
- ***Also involved in ESRA (Environmental Sustainability Rotary Action Group), as well as Operation Pollination Ambassadors international group.***
- ***Named multiple Paul Harris Fellow, Rotary Benefactor and other awards and recognitions.***

Center Place Fine Arts and Civic Association

- *President of the Board of Directors – Center dedicated to the arts and education of youth and adults, including special needs programming.*

Timberly Trust

- *Secretary and Trustee for the Julia Moseley Homestead in Brandon, Florida which was originally built at its current site in the mid 1800's.*

Greater Brandon Action Network

- *Vice-President of Association responsible for presenting Brandon's annual 4th of July parade, now in its 68th year.*

Other

- *Hillsborough County Republican Executive Committee; "Preserving Brandon" organization and Brandon Community Roundtable*

Education

- *University of Florida – Major: Public Relations; Minors: Agriculture and Sociology*
- *Notre Dame – Graduate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Academy*
- *University of Georgia – Graduate of the U.S. Chamber Institutes*

Other Major Recognitions

- *Brandon's Key Citizen*
- *Riverview Citizen of the Year*

Other Career Activities

- *Greater Brandon Chamber of Commerce – Executive Director & Directory Publisher*

May 2025

Betty Jo Tompkins

Walsh, Joe

From: SoilandWater
Sent: Wednesday, October 29, 2025 4:07 PM
To: 'DPIHelpline@FDACS.gov'
Cc: Tom Gonzalez (Special Counsel-HSWCD); Walsh, Joe
Subject: Public Records Request, screening of the Florida Registered Beekeepers database, all available years

Expires: Tuesday, January 27, 2026 12:00 AM

TO: Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Plant Industry

RE: Public Records Request, Screening of the Florida Registered Beekeepers database, all available years

To whom it concerns-

The Board of Supervisors, Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District directed me to perform an independent due diligence review of available public records to substantiate the qualification of Supervisor Elizabeth “Betty Jo” Tompkins to serve the office of Supervisor under Chapter 582, F.S.

A public complaint was raised to our Board of Supervisors in February 2025 that there was no readily available public record supporting Elizabeth “Betty Jo” Tompkins’ qualifications to serve elected office of Board Supervisor under Chapter 582, F.S.

Mrs. Tompkins claims to have based her affidavit for qualification to serve the office of supervisor under F.S. 582 on her experience as a beekeeper “for many years”. Supervisor Tompkins made statements during regular Board of Supervisor meetings, that she had kept bees at her home in Brandon up until the hurricanes of 2024 destroyed her bees. However, she has provided no substantive proof of being a beekeeper, either by way of documents or of photographic evidence in this regard.

Most of our Board Supervisors are not beekeepers and were therefore unaware of Florida Statute Chapter 586, and Rule 5B-54, and therefore also unaware that Mrs. Tompkins easily could have substantiated her claim at any time. I now understand that FDACS first started keeping the Beekeeper’s registry in its current form in 2013.

Hence, I am asking for a written statement from the Department, detailing which years of the available records Mrs. Tompkins appears to have registered as a beekeeper with the department. Please do not send the Beekeeper’s Registry Database in its raw form, as we want no possibility of an accusation that we have manipulated data on this end.

Mrs. Tompkins has used three variations on her name for business purposes over the last twenty-five years:

- Elizabeth Padron Tompkins
- Betty Jo Tompkins
- Elizabeth P Tompkins

Mrs. Tompkins has two known addresses in Hillsborough County:

- 3440 Yale Circle, Riverview, Fl 33578, which presumably was her original residence dating back to 1975

And

- 1706 S. Kings Avenue, Brandon, Fl 33511, her current residence, which has been in her possession since 2005

Thank You in advance for your support with this request. Digital correspondence can be sent to SoilandWater@HCFL.GOV and any follow up questions can be directed to me at (813) 347-6706.

Respectfully Yours,

Joseph Walsh, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Email: walshjo@HCFL.GOV
mobile: 813.347.6706

Office Email: SoilandWater@HCFL.gov
Office phone: 813.707.1652



On the web: [Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District \(hillsboroughswcd.com\)](http://hillsboroughswcd.com)

Walsh, Joe

From: McMahon, Sheila <Sheila.Mcmahon@fdacs.gov>
Sent: Monday, November 3, 2025 4:33 PM
To: SoilandWater
Subject: RESPONSE / Public Records Request, screening of the Florida Registered Beekeepers database, all available years

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

External email: Use caution when clicking on links, opening attachments or replying to this email.

Good afternoon,

Following an inquiry using multiple variations of her name, both known street addresses, and Hillsborough County as search parameters, I was unable to locate any record indicating that a Certificate of Apiary Registration was ever issued (certified) to Elizabeth "Betty Joe" Tompkins.

If she had bees registered with the State of Florida and they were destroyed in 2024, her record would reflect the years she was certified and note whether she remains active or is listed as out of business (no longer maintaining bees).

Please let me know if you need any additional information or assistance regarding this request.

Best regards,
~Sheila

Sheila McMahon
Administrative Assistant III, Director's Office
Public Records Liaison
Division of Plant Industry
Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

(352) 395-4629 Office
(352) 262-1634 Cell
Sheila.McMahon@FDACS.gov

Division of Plant Industry
Doyle Conner Building
1911 SW 34th Street
Gainesville, Florida 32608-1201
www.fdacs.gov



Please note that Florida has a broad public records law (Chapter 119, Florida Statutes). Most written communications to or from state employees are public records obtainable by the public upon request. Emails sent to me at this email address may be considered

public and will only be withheld from disclosure if deemed confidential pursuant to the laws of the State of Florida

From: DPIHelpline <DPIHelpline@fdacs.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, October 29, 2025 4:19 PM
To: McMahan, Sheila <Sheila.Mcmahan@fdacs.gov>
Subject: Fw: Public Records Request, screening of the Florida Registered Beekeepers database, all available years

Paris Grey
Helpline Manager
Division of Plant Industry
Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Paris.Grey@FDACS.gov
(352) 395-4604 (office)
PO Box 147100
Gainesville, Florida 32614-7100
www.FDACS.gov

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From: SoilandWater <SoilandWater@hcfl.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, October 29, 2025 4:06 PM
To: DPIHelpline <DPIHelpline@fdacs.gov>
Cc: Tom Gonzalez (Special Counsel-HSWCD) <Thomas.Gonzalez@gray-robinson.com>; Walsh, Joe <WalshJo@hcfl.gov>
Subject: Public Records Request, screening of the Florida Registered Beekeepers database, all available years

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Joseph Walsh, Ph.D.

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