

Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District

Meeting of the Board of Supervisors

September 15, 2025

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

Board Supervisors in attendance: Terri Parke (Seat 1); Betty Jo Tompkins (Seat 2); Gretchen Hoke (Seat 3); Aly Sullivan (Seat 5; *virtually, by phone*)

Staff Support: Dr. Joe Walsh (Executive Director); Dawn Chancey (Office Manager), and Special Counsel Tom Gonzalez (*virtually, by phone*).

Items 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 Representation in Attendance: None in person; *none via conferencing hub due to connection issues.*

Public in Attendance: Casey Runkles (Simmons Farm)

Item 5. Public Comment: None at this meeting

Item 6. Public Correspondence: None at this meeting.

Item 7. Review and Approval of Agenda: Supervisor Hoke moved to accept this agenda for September 15, 2025. Supervisor Tompkins seconded. Motion approved 4-0.

Item 7a. Introduction of Non-Agenda Items: None at this meeting.

Item 8. Board Seat 4, Appointment - Dr. Walsh introduced Casey Runkles, Simmons Farm, to the Board as a self-nominee for Board Seat 4, noting that Mrs. Runkles had provided sufficient documentation prior to the deadline, to qualify for the position (voter registration card; officer of commercial strawberry producer on agricultural land in Hillsborough County). Supervisor Hoke initiated the interview of Mrs. Runkles, who established her interest in serving on the Board as follows: She was raised in a very pro agricultural family; sees the city of Plant City and surrounding areas changing and we need to support agriculture in any way we can; needing the Board to help educate the general public about why agriculture is so important; needing to teach people just where their food comes from; and noting that “*Frustration ends where education begins*”. No other supervisors offered questions for Mrs. Runkles. Supervisor Hoke moved to accept Mrs. Runkles nomination and appoint her to the board; Supervisor Tompkins seconded; Motion carried, 4-0. Supervisor Parke welcomed newly appointed Supervisor Runkles to the Board; Dr. Walsh advised that Supervisor Runkles needed to complete new supervisor forms with

Dawn Chancey after the meeting; Supervisor Runkles participated in the remainder of the Board meeting.

Item 9. Partner Agency Reports: *Due to internet connection issues, none of the Board's regular agency partner representatives appeared at this meeting.*

Item 10. Minutes of August 18, 2025, HSWCD Regular Board Meeting: The Board's meeting minutes from August 18, 2025, were presented. Supervisor Tompkins stated that she wanted to make some changes/updates to her portion of the minutes from August 18, 2025. Referencing Item 14, under Supervisor Parke's report, regarding the issue of "showcasing" or "endorsing" any one vendor's services, Supervisor Tompkins reiterated that the Board operates as a government agency and needed to be careful not to show any favoritism when we are showcasing commercial businesses on our website. Dr. Walsh reiterated that he is currently working on a policy to better organize how we balance presentation of novel technologies offering value for conservation purposes with the expectation of avoiding an unfair advantage for one service provider over others on the website. Supervisor Hoke moved to accept the meeting minutes with the minor changes; Supervisor Tompkins seconded; Motion carried, 5-0.

Item 11. Financial Report for August 2025: The August 2025 Financial Report and bank statement were reviewed. Supervisor Hoke moved to accept and file for audit the August 2025 Financial Report and Bank statement; Supervisor Parke seconded; Motion carried, 5-0.

Item 12. Maid Easy Cleaning Services Contract: Supervisor Parke presented the proposed contract for office cleaning services with Maid Easy Professionals Services, noting the yearly contract is \$5,400.00 for weekly cleaning of the office located at 4503 Coronet Road, Plant City, FL 33566. Motion was made to accept the current contract for FY 2026 by Supervisor Hoke; Supervisor Tompkins seconded; Motion carried, 5-0. Supervisor Parke executed the letter to Hillsborough County Procurement Services awarding the contract for the time period of June 28th, 2025 – June 27th, 2026.

Item 13. Assoc. Florida Conservation Districts (AFCD) – Membership Invitation Letter FY2026: Supervisor Parke presented the AFCD's 2026 renewal invitation letter for consideration; (Price of renewal membership is \$500.00). Dr. Walsh offered consideration of an alternative membership in Florida Fruits and Vegetables Association (FFVA), noting that the price was the same. The following points were discussed – both organizations are statewide and meetings are likely to require out-of-county travel; the value of the Board's AFCD membership was debated regularly in 2024; the AFCD Executive Board's efforts to reorganize the AFCD were not readily apparent, and there was concern that the Conservation District does not at this time have resources to support the AFCD effort; and the FFVA has actual constituents that Dr. Walsh had concerns about not engaging with. Some members of the Florida Strawberry Growers Assoc are in the FFVA, and in that aspect, they do not need to be reached twice over. The topic of renewing membership in the AFCD was tabled for a later discussion in 2026.

Item 14. By-Laws, Fiscal Controls and Budget Rules: Dr. Walsh stated that during the August 18, 2025, Board meeting, the Board agreed to schedule a workshop to construct By-Laws and to conduct an Annual Budget meeting for 2026. Board members agreed to schedule these activities

tentatively for October 21, 2025 @ 10:00 am. Dr. Walsh needed to verify his schedule with the Plant City Leadership before he could commit to this date. Dr. Walsh requested that all Supervisors bring examples of other by-laws and bullet points of desired conditions to ensure a productive meeting.

Item 15. Supervisor Announcements:

Supervisor Parke: Supervisor Parke stated that she attended the Citrus Expo and felt they had great response. She has also worked with Margie Martin on the Phase 1 Outreach. Supervisor Parke also reminded the board that the Survey for Plant City's 2050 Comprehensive Plan was now open. She encouraged everyone to take part in the survey and to promote agriculture at every opportunity throughout the Plant City community.

Supervisor Hoke: attended the Citrus Expo, taking time to attend the specialty crops sessions, which is stimulating her thoughts about conservation of agriculture and agricultural lands. She also attended the Florida Cattlemen's Association quarterly meeting, participating in their newly formed emergency operations and procedures committee; she heard from Mind Your Melon about mental health for agricultural producers and emphasized the importance of ag education and research for future generations. She recently had an in-depth conversation with Extension Agent Allie Williams, discussing options for the District's strategic plan, and potential services for our local ag producers. She also participated in the 1000 Friends of Florida webinar on community visioning for conservation; she tied what she heard there to ideas she has been promoting for the Hansen Development/EIP project in eastern Hillsborough County/Turkey Creek area. She noted that wildlife data suggests an unrealized opportunity to conserve connectivity across State Road 60, using "equine overpasses". What connected land we have left in Hillsborough County should not be fragmented, except as a last resort. She noted that Dr. Joe Walsh and she had attended a community meeting at Bailey Elementary, where the plans for the proposed Hansen Development/EIP were showcased. Lastly, she mentioned her interview with Martin Communications, towards the District's Strategic Plan, focusing her comments on ways the District can engage in sustainability of eastern Hillsborough agriculture, and a leadership role in the management of land development activity.

Supervisor Tompkins: Supervisor Tompkins participated in the Citrus & Specialty Crops Expo at the Florida State Fairgrounds. She distributed conservation materials at the 4H Open House at the State Fairgrounds. She participated in multiple sessions at Florida Federation of Fairs Summer Meeting at State Fairgrounds. Supervisor Tompkins also participated in historical tour with Preserving Brandon; on the committee that presented Timberly Trust Labor Day picnic to benefit the historic Julia Moseley Homestead; and managed coloring stations for youth at conservation outreach events; Hillsborough County Fair Board meetings and co-chair of the 2025 County Fair Harvest Awards; Hillsborough County Fair's committee chair for conservation and horticulture exhibits ; chair of Super Plant Auction; and continued work with a conservation mini-grant program.

Supervisor Sullivan: Nothing to report at this time.

Item 16. Directors Report: Dr. Walsh reported the following:

Brooke Saunders – he finished two letters of commendation for Brooke...one from the Board and one from him and already conveyed his letter to Brooke and to one of the department heads at UF College of Agriculture. Dr. Walsh presented the Board letter for Supervisor Parke’s signature on behalf of the Board; Supervisor Tompkins clarified that her intent at the previous meeting had been for the Board letter to be formatted for the entire board’s signatures; she asked that Dr. Walsh make the change; there was general support among the Board members of this clarification.

Web page policy – regarding mention of novel technologies where a presentation has been made by a single vendor; Dr. Walsh said the draft policy is on his to-do list but no progress yet; he assured the Board that no postings that ran counter to the Board’s intent would be made before they had a draft policy to consider.

Customer Contacts and Social media reports - Dr. Walsh presented the web analytics reports for the website and Facebook. Phone based contacts are still low (less than 10 contacts per month); website visits and new subscriptions are continuing to trend upward (just shy of 80 thousand clicks in August, with about 40 subscribers); Facebook has trended down from its peak during the 2024 hurricane response, to about 750 views for August 2025. It has been suggested that the District should invest effort in an Instagram account, although Dr. Walsh contended that YouTube channels continue to outstrip all other social media combined. Dr. Walsh requested that the Supervisors gather a “social media wish list” as he is working on the web page policy.

Dr. Walsh handed off presentation to Margie Martin (Martin Communications) to provide a summary of the stakeholder engagement she organized for the Strategic Plan. Briefly, she shared that interviews were concentrated with our biggest agricultural trade associations (Florida Strawberry Growers Association, Florida Farm Bureau, Cattlemen’s Association, and Florida Nursery Growers and Landscapers Association). Margie shared some overarching themes that bubbled up in the stakeholder interviews including the establishment of a more formal Advisory body for the Board, to include growers, nurseries, ranchers, landscapers and trade associations; suggestions that the Conservation District expand as a resource hub and equipment owner/operator; continue to pursue cost sharing opportunities and invest in pilot projects/demonstrations.

Item 17. Old Business:

Supervisor Tompkins Qualification, Letter to the Governor - Supervisor Tompkins inquired whether Supervisor Parke was the one that drafted the letter to the Governor or merely signed the letter. Special Counsel Gonzalez confirmed he had drafted the overarching points and that Dr. Walsh had been called upon to flesh out details based on the available public records. Supervisor Tompkins then wanted to know if this was the actual letter that was shared with Commissioner of Agriculture or any other local Agriculture groups and if the letter was changed before being sent to the Governor. Dr. Walsh confirmed that this letter was not the same letter sent to Commissioner Simpson, but that it was the letter that had been read in draft to the Board the previous month. Attorney Gonzalez acknowledged that he had not interviewed any constituents, having only drafted the letter based on the records of the District and items submitted by Supervisor Tompkins. Dr. Walsh confirmed that the content in the letter was factual in the wording chosen and the charges

were based on the records available. Supervisor Tompkins characterized the letter as containing inaccuracies and falsehoods, noting that it had been published on the website as such.

Item 18. FY2026 Annual Audit Potential Firms Presentations:

Mauldin & Jenkins: Daniel Anderson and Danny Rausch presented to the Board of Supervisors. Daniel presented that they bring several unique items to the table with regard to audits: they have performed 300+ single audits over the last year covering over \$5.3 Billion of Federal grants; 165,000+ hours annually provided to governmental clients; currently partnered with 31 Governmental partners & directors. They currently work with several governmental agencies around the area, including City of Plant City, City of Haines City, Polk Transit authority to name a few. Dr. Walsh pointed out that Mauldin & Jenkins was the auditing firm that performed the OPPAGA performance audit of this District, and so they have some familiarity with our records and still have several years of records in house. If hired, Mauldin & Jenkins would take responsibility for contacting our previous auditor to obtain the 2024 audit records. Daniel Anderson provided this overview: There are three major components to the audit process - 1. Planning and interim procedures; 2. Year-end procedures (final fieldwork) and 3. Review/Completion and delivery. In the context of a multi-year contract, which is highly recommended, Mauldin & Jenkins quoted the following fee schedule: First year, 100 hours for a total of \$13,500.00; 2nd year approximately \$14,000 and 3rd year would be approximately \$14,500.00. Daniel suggested that if they start around mid-October, they can have everything completed by Thanksgiving.

CliftonLarsonAllen LLP (CLA): Julie Fowler presented for CLA; they have 60+ years in business; 600+ professionals nationwide; clientele includes approximately 4200+ Government agencies representing about \$180+ Million in revenue. They audited nearly \$229 billion in federal funds expended in 2023. CLA performs single audits for hundreds of organizations annually, ranking top in the nation for the number of single audits performed by any CPA firm, noting that a single audit requires a specific set of skills to properly perform the procedures. As such, CLA has developed a group of professionals who specialize in providing single audit services. The District would benefit from a high level of hands-on service from CLA team's senior professionals. Their senior level professionals would be involved and immediately available throughout the entire engagement process. CLA's timeline for the project is starting date of October 1st with final presentation to the Board expected by March of 2026. CLA quoted the following fee schedule: 150 hours for the first year for a total of ~\$20,975.00; estimating approximately a 2-3% increase for year 2 and approximately 3-4% increase for year 3.

After the presentations from both organizations, Dr. Walsh reminded the Board that Mauldin & Jenkins is familiar with our organization as they worked with us for the OPPAGA audit. Noting each firm's pricing as a major consideration, Supervisor Tompkins moved to award the contract to Mauldin & Jenkins; seconded by Supervisor Runkles; motion carried, 5-0.

Dr. Walsh was directed to notify Mauldin & Jenkins before the end of the week of their selection and work with County Procurement to begin the purchase order procedures.

Adjournment: Chair Parke adjourned the meeting at 12:00 P.M.