

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

**November 17, 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); Casey Runkles (Seat 4)

**Staff Support:** Dr Joe Walsh (Executive Director); Dawn Chancey (Office Manager); 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 10:00 am; 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:** Ellen Cruz, FDACS-Regional Director (*virtually, via teams*); Ken Griner, SWFWMD Farms Environmental Engineer (*virtually, via teams*); Margie Martin, Martin Communications (*virtually, via teams*); Celeste McLaughlin, Martin Communications; Andrew Kearse, USDA-NRCS

**Public in Attendance:** Ms. Debbie Hunt (*virtually, via teams*); Steven Russell, Board Supervisor Panther Trace II Community Development District (*virtually, via teams*).

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

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

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

Item 7a Introduction of Non Agenda Items – Dr. Walsh requested Chair Parke allow for addition of agenda item 17(b) Fact Finding report regarding Supervisor Tompkins Qualifications to serve Office.

Supervisor Hoke moved to accept this agenda with the addition of Item 7a Fact Finding report for November 17th, 2025. Supervisor Runkles seconded. Motion carried 4-0.

**Item 8: Update on Call for Candidates Seat 5:** Dr. Walsh reported not having received any applications for appointment to Seat 5. Dr. Walsh had a conversation with an interested person regarding qualifications and that individual decided not to pursue it further. Dr. Walsh was notified of one more possible candidate that he intends to contact. The current window is set to close on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025. The Board will discuss the next steps at the next regular meeting scheduled for December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2025.

**Item 9 Partner Agency Reports:**

- a. SWFWMD, Ken Griner, FARMS program Environmental Engineer – Ken reported that Jeff Whealton has been very busy with compliance issues. On the FARMS program side SWFWMD’s allocated dollars have been available since October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025 for both the main program and the mini farms. If you know of anyone that is expanding their farms or creating new commodity farms, we pay for items, which is the weather station – automation or litigation. We also help with alternative water supply. We have paid for entire water supply/pump stations from roof to concrete, filters and main line piping. So, if you know of anyone that is interested in any of those items for the main farmers program or the mini farm we can go up to \$10,000 per year, five projects total within a lifetime.
- b. USDA/NRCS, Andrew Kearse newly appointed District Conservationist – Andrew introduced himself as the new District Conservationist out of the Plant City office on Collins Street. He just moved from Louisiana and is very honored to be part of the team and looking forward to working with everyone. This is only his 3<sup>rd</sup> day – he doesn’t have business cards and only has a loaner laptop at this time. Dr. Walsh commented to Andrew that we have been waiting for a new District Conservationist for a long time and are very excited to have him available to us. Dr. Walsh noted to Andrew that the District is in the process of hiring two new technical positions as well and would like to arrange ride-alongs with Andrew for training purposes.
- c. FDACS, Ellen Cruz, Regional Director – Ellen reported that since our last Board meeting, FDACS has drafted its priorities for the next legislative session for presentation as the Florida Farm Bill. Ellen offered to send over a copy of the 2026 Florida Farm Bill Poster to Dawn for posting. Some of the highlights:

- FDACS is looking for continue to defend Florida Farmers, ranchers-in-residence, the use of their farmland and help with financially offsetting farmers' investment in the equipment of their choosing.
  - Next, FDACS law enforcement is busting CDL truckers who cheat on their proficiency exams, so helping to further [the highway safety] cause and making sure that everyone is operating safe and doing what they should be doing.
  - New Veterinarian financial assistance - FDACS is proposing to provide financial offset to newly licensed veterinarians, going into agricultural-large-animal practice. FSDACS is proposing a loan repayment program to reimburse up to \$25,000 a year, as there is a dire shortage of large animal veterinarians in their field generally, but especially in Florida.
  - Permanent Florida Farmers – a proposal to facilitate expansion of the practice of sending surplus milk to food banks instead of the practice of dumping. FDACS already is championing the cause of sending surplus milk to food banks and now is looking to expand that effort to include other foods like fresh vegetables, peanuts, etc.
  - Surplus Lands/reinvesting in Agriculture – FDACS is championing a proposal to revert lands that the State has purchased rights to since 2024, back into agriculture production to protect our domestic food supply.
  - Support of First Responders with proposal to make it a crime in Florida to possess, sell, distribute, or use any signal jamming devices. Then we are going to be able to make sure our citizens safety, our food safety, food supply and making sure that they are continuing on their operation, best way possible.
  - Dr. Walsh responded with questions about the surplus food program. For farmers that have excess items, how will they make their food available? Will there be a portal through Tallahassee or is there going to be a portal through Hillsborough County? Dr. Walsh offered to put Supervisor Runkles in contact with Ellen as Hillsborough County Florida Farm Bureau's current president.
- d. Hillsborough County Agribusiness Development/AECD/Cooperative Extension Service, Simon Bollin –Blue Star Families and Fresh from Florida event [Friday, November 14<sup>th</sup>]. Simon was not able to self-report here, however Ellen Cruz highlighted some of Simon's efforts on his behalf. This event brought military families in and did a lunch and dinner date that taught them how to use Fresh from Florida items and make affordable meals using local products.

**Item 10 Minutes of October 20, 2025 Regular Board Meeting** - Chair Parke asked if all have reviewed the meeting minutes from September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2025. Supervisor Tompkins requested correction under Supervisors Report, where the draft listed all

Supervisors as “Chair”; Supervisor Runkles requested correction under the Annual Elected Official Lamb Showmanship event to read as the “2<sup>nd</sup>” annual event. All corrections noted and updated to the minutes. Chair Parke issued a Motion to accept the meeting minutes. Supervisor Hoke 2<sup>nd</sup> the motion. Motion carried 4-0.

Chair Parke provided Supervisor Tompkins with a copy of the letter to the Governor’s office [with all attachments] per her request at the October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025, meeting. Chair Parke noted on behalf of office staff that the packet had been printed on October 21, 2025, and that Supervisor Tompkins had been advised that the package was ready to pick up at District Office as of October 22, 2025.

**Item 11 Financial Report for September 2025** – Vice-Chair/Treasurer Hoke stated that she has reviewed the September 2025 Financial Report and had no questions for staff. Vice-Chair/Treasurer Hoke motioned to accept the September 30<sup>th</sup> bank statements and reconciliation for audit; Supervisor Runkles seconded the motion; motion carried, 4-0.

**Item 12 By Laws Presentation and Adoption** – Dr. Walsh presented the draft by-laws that were generated out of the informal workshop held on October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2025, with Supervisors Parke, Hoke, and Runkles, Special Counsel Gonzalez and Exec. Director Walsh participating; Supervisor Tompkins was absent; Dawn Chancey recorded the effort. In 2023, the newly elected Board adopted what they had called an Order of Business document, which only governed the conduct of meetings and voting. Dr. Walsh merged that information into a draft that Supervisor Runkles provided ahead of the October 21<sup>st</sup> workshop, and Special Counsel Gonzalez provided additional legal review afterwards. The draft was posted to the District’s website on November 10<sup>th</sup>, with email notices going out to the Board members and interested parties on that same date. Motion- Vice-Chair Hoke made motion to approve and adopt the By Laws; Chair Parke seconded the motion. Motion carried 4-0. All Supervisors then executed the By Laws by signature.

**Item 13 FY26 Budget Authorization and Recommendations** - Dr. Walsh presented a summary of the HCBOCC contribution to the FY 2026 Budget and advised that the Board needed to formally adopt its own budget and delegate spending authorities at the beginning of each budget cycle. He commented that Special Counsel and he agreed that a formal approval of the budget and spending authorities are a fundamental necessity in operating transparently under Florida

Government-in-the-Sunshine requirements, and that executing multiple steps in the approval process consistent with HCBOCC's budget policies was critical. At its regular meeting March 2025, the Board had approved its "proposed" County budget amendments for FY 2026 and FY 2027 for transmittal to HCBOCC; the County-approved budget item came back at 100%, without any changes, with an effective date of October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025, for FY 2026. Hence, Dr. Walsh is asking the Board to formally adopt this budget for FY2026 and to delegate Executive Director Walsh and Office Manager Chancey with transactional authorities. Chair Parke called for a Motion to adopt the FY 2026 Budget and to delegate spending authority to Dr. Walsh and Dawn Chancey. Supervisor Hoke made the motion to adopt the FY2026 annual HCBOCC contribution to the District budget and to delegate spending authority to Executive Director Walsh and Office Manager Dawn Chancey. Supervisor Runkles seconded the motion. Discussion was as follows:

Supervisor Tompkins questioned three items that were highlighted yellow on the administrative portion of the budget as follows:

- Internet allocation – a line item to our administrative budget to pay for the internet connectivity in the new office building. Although Hillsborough County administration pays the bill, the item is required to have its own callout; this item was added in 2024 when the County adjusted the budget to cover for the new office location.
- Utilities – during the budget prep timeframe, and just prior to the signing of our lease for the fire station, County Real Estate Services (RES) decided that the Conservation District needed to pay TECO directly for our electric utilities and so we budgeted \$2,000 a year for that line item and debited it from our miscellaneous line item. In the time frame after the budget had to be submitted and final approval by the HCBOCC, the County Financial Officer in the County Clerk's Office stepped in and clarified that they already pay a single bill for all county facilities. Consequently, Dr. Walsh has noted that \$2,000 item for this discussion.
- Miscellaneous Expense – Highlighted because this line item has seen the greatest amount of change in the last two years of budget cycle. Dr. Walsh has moved money from this line item to others when those other costs have been recognized as annually recurring and fixed, examples being commercial bonds, pest control,

maid services and the rising costs of annual audits. Dr. Walsh noted that there still is a high degree of uncertainty with the costs of the proposed windows and painting projects for the building for FY 2026, and wanted the Board to be aware that we have adequate funds in the miscellaneous line item to cover those uncertainties for FY2026.

- Supervisor Tompkins requested clarification of the entire budget amount for FY2026 and where this report came from. Dr. Walsh stated that the total budget for FY 2026 is \$664,703.00, and that number included the much larger portion that HC Admin calculates for the human resources that it manages. Dr. Walsh said that the report being reviewed here was the administrative portion from an actual report downloaded from Hillsborough County Management and Budget's dashboard for our accounting string.
- Dr. Walsh also reminded the Board that he would be coming back to them in January to request any budget changes for FY2027. The Board will need to be prepared to review and formally recommend any changes so that he can submit those to County Admin in February, consistent with the County's FY 2027 budget approval timeline.

Chair Parke called the vote on the FY 2026 budget approval and spending authority delegated to Executive Director Walsh and Office Manager Dawn Chancey. The motion carried with Supervisors Parke, Hoke and Runkles voting "Aye"; Supervisor Tompkins voting "nay".

**Item 14 Strategic Plan Presentation and Adoption**, Dr. Walsh/Margie Martin/Celeste McLaughlin – Dr. Walsh reported that the final draft Strategic Plan is ready for review/approval and publication. Dr. Walsh stated that he had arranged with Margie Martin to have her team take lead for the project, so that he could focus on being just a technical contributor. He complimented Margie Martin and Celeste McLaughlin on their efficiency and quality of leadership in taking lead in running the show and organizing the final product.

- The approach to the plan had been to develop it in phases over its five-year life cycle, emphasizing "planning" earlier and "technical performance" later. Hence, the first year reflects the District's efforts at realigning itself with its legislative purpose and stakeholder inputs and the second year focuses on staff training and reintroduction of technical services to the service area. The latter three years/phases represent an escalation of technical services and an evolving role for the Board in setting policy related to the decision-making authorities of other

agencies and partners. He suggested that the Board should expect to come back and add more granularity to the annual work plans as the district grows in its role.

- Celeste McLaughlin stated that the draft plan was sent out to all of the Board members and made available to partners as well as the public for review and comment. The plan is structured on nine (9) priorities with performance metrics for each priority being a bit different year after year.
- Supervisor Tompkins remarked that although the team had requested all the Supervisors review and provide feedback by November 10<sup>th</sup>, she was unable to submit her comments on time due to her commitment to the Hillsborough County Fair and she wanted to know if her comments were addressed within the plan. Chair Parke advised that we would be attaching her comments to the report but not altering the strategic plan, as they were not provided before the cutoff date for all supervisor and public comments.

Supervisors Parke, Hoke, and Runkles each read into the meeting record the comments they had submitted before the cutoff date.

- Chair Parke - *“It is my belief on the strategic plan that it is incumbent on the District Board to develop policy agendas that support and advocate for our rural working lands. I believe the District Board should also be who our stakeholders come to for information, suggestions and help in navigating what technical services are offered and available to them.”*
- Supervisor Runkles - *“The section on communication, community education and engagement reflects a real understanding that many stakeholders in the public may not know about the district or the services we provide. Sharing the story of agriculture and conservation is essential not only to raise awareness but also to build trust, appreciation and long-term support for the district's mission.”*
- Supervisor Hoke - *“The District provides important technical assistance and BMP education but could strengthen its leadership role by policy focus on farmland preservation and growth management. I encourage exploring partnerships or funding models that would allow the district to facilitate or co-hold voluntary agricultural and conservation easements, complementing existing county and state programs. That was really important to me. And then one that was noted but I definitely want to talk more about in the future. We already collaborate with NRCS, FDACS, Southwest Water Management, UF Extension, and the FWC. But a next step could be formalizing a working lands*

*and corridor partners network. I didn't get to explain much here but I would like to do that at a further date. I have some more ideas for that.”*

Chair Parke called for a Motion to accept the Strategic Plan and implement it with the publication deadline of December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025. Supervisor Hoke seconded the motion. Motion passed 3-1, Supervisors Parke, Hoke and Runkles voting “aye”; Supervisor Tompkins voting “nay”.

### **Item 15 - Supervisors Reports**

**Chair Parke** – reported that she participated in the Board’s By-Laws workshop meeting on October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025. Also participated in three strategic planning team meetings and then she was sick for two weeks.

**Supervisor Hoke** – reported that she:

- participated in the 1,000 Friends of Florida “Beyond the Zoning Map” webinar. One thing that really stood out to her was how some counties in Florida are going back and amending their comprehensive plan when they see something is not working. She thought that was very encouraging. It’s a good reminder that nothing is set in stone and we can always make improvements as we learn more. She feels this lesson is something we could all benefit from.
- Participated in a Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation Webinar.
- Participated in a Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council webinar where they were focused on natural resources and environmental impacts and going over some new information as well as the Southwest Florida Water Management District going over SB712.
- Attended the Horse Farms Forever Conservation Summit in Marion County. This year’s theme was “how a horse thinks.” She had the opportunity to meet Dr. Temple Grandin, the famous animal behaviorist at Colorado State University. Her main takeaway was seeing how Marion County includes farmland preservation in their comprehensive plan. They have someone present in every land use hearing to make sure farmland concerns are part of the public record. She thought it was impressive to see another county taking that level of care to their agricultural land.

- Lastly, Supervisor Hoke wanted to make sure everyone was aware of the Florida Women Landowners Group. They are a really incredible resource for agriculture, women in agriculture and just sustainable practices.

**Supervisor Tompkins** – reported that she

- Addressed the Hillsborough County Legislative Delegation on October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2025.
- Participated in the Green Belt program provided by Extension Service, on October 23<sup>rd</sup>.
- Hosted Leadership of Brandon at the Mosely Homestead Historic site.
- between October 23<sup>rd</sup> until November 14<sup>th</sup>, she was working at the Hillsborough County Fair, supervising set ups, takedowns and the participation of county agencies, the Florida Beekeepers Association and Hillsborough County Beekeepers Association.
- Sponsored the youth plant show at the Fair.
- conducted the Fair’s annual plan auction, which was very successful.
- She sponsored a Rain Barrel Decorating Competition, through her nonprofit, the Florida Conservation Coalition, and
- participated in activities on behalf of Hillsborough County 4-H Foundation.

Dr. Walsh requested that Supervisor Tompkins provide clarification on the first item she mentioned. Supervisor Tompkins advised that she attended the Hillsborough County Legislative Delegation meeting on October 21, 2025. As she was committed to that event, she was unable to attend the workshop regarding the Bylaws for the Conservation District’s Board of Supervisors.

**Supervisor Runkles** reported she-

- attended the Bylaws workshop on October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2025 as well as the Farm Bureau State Convention.
- Jeb Smith was reelected as the President of the Florida Farm Bureau. The new theme is from The Ground Up, which she felt fits well with the district mission.
- Encouraged everyone to attend January 27<sup>th</sup> – Farm Bureau Day in Tallahassee. If anyone is interested in attending, its always good to have a great presence with all of our commodity groups and organization. This event is the week after Boots on the Hill in Tallahassee.

- Thanked everyone who participated as elected officials in the Lamb Showmanship event at the Hillsborough County fairgrounds.
- attended the AI Research Center groundbreaking event, remarking it was a great event.
- She completed the National Women in Ag Study.

### **Item 16 Directors Report –**

- a) Window Replacement Quotes – Dr. Walsh advised that of six solicitations, we have received four quotes for the office’s window replacements. Of those, three arranged site visits, explained their process to Dr. Walsh, took measurements and assessed the construction and condition of the building. Each of those three had personal referrals to Dr. Walsh. He was confident that all three had presented their estimates with a high degree of confidence against variance. Hence, based on cost alone, he recommended awarding the project to Solution Source, at an estimated cost of \$11,743.00. Chair Parke requested a motion to award the window replacement contract to Solution Source. Supervisor Tompkins moved to award the windows replacement contract to Solutions Source; Supervisor Hoke seconded the motion; motion carried 4-0.
- b) FY2025 Audit Update *Dr. Walsh with Daniel Anderson/Mauldin & Jenkins* – Dr. Walsh advised that we have received procurement approval from Hillsborough County to proceed with Mauldin and Jenkins to perform our audit. Dawn has submitted the first set of documents to Daniel Anderson for review. Mr. Anderson stated that Mauldin & Jenkins appreciated the Board’s awarding of the contract and confirmed receipt of the first set of documents. He was optimistic that Mauldin & Jenkins could provide a draft of the audit by the next board meeting in December.
- c) Procurement Contracts – Dr. Walsh provided some clarification on Hillsborough County’s procurement rules for contracts, suggesting that changes in their rules necessitated occasional adjustments in this Board’s fiscal rules and crystallized the need for the Board to have bylaws governing not only its meetings, but also its fiscal rules. Dr. Walsh shared that he had recently been “slapped on the wrist” for awarding Martin Communications

two projects in a row at a total cost exceeding the County's \$10,000 threshold for informal bidding (exceeded by ~\$1,000).

- d) SouthState Bank Merchant Services, presented by Dr. Walsh and Dawn Chancey – we are working on the District's ability to accept online payments, considering the farm equipment rental program that we are proposing. Our website provider, Streamline, suggested working with a third party, and we are consulting with SouthState Bank in that regard. One option is to use a QR Code for digital payment on our rental invoices; this would enable our customers to have payments processed immediately and eliminate our handling of payments.
- e) Staff Hiring Update – Dr. Walsh has three interviews scheduled for the week of November 17th for both technical positions; Because the subject matter will be the same for both positions, Dr. Walsh asked County HR to invite all candidates to apply for both positions. His intention is to interview candidates with both positions in mind, and select best fit for the land Conservation Specialist, with the second-best fit being offered the Conservation Technician position. His goal is to have offers made and accepted in time for Christmas, with start dates as soon as possible in the new year. Dr. Walsh directed comments to Andrew Kearse, NRCS, to this effect - our goal was to ensure that it would always be plenty of capacity to do work in the local area regardless of staffing shortages either at FDACS or at NRCS. We intend for our staff to become certified conservation planners, so that our work products will be acceptable in support of NRCS and FDACS cost share applications and performance monitoring.
- f) Plant City Chamber's Leadership visit, Wednesday, November 12th – the Plant City Leadership Institute class of 2026 visited our office last week. This visit was the second by the leadership institute. Supervisor Hoke co-hosted with Dr. Walsh; questions about our mission and vision got into land use planning policy.
- g) Dr. Walsh Annual Self Evaluation – Dr. Walsh prepared a rundown of where he has taken the agency over the last year, opining that this year was a continuation of the Board's direction to him when he was first hired. He commented that his priorities reflected sense of urgency with scrutiny of the agency coming from ag constituents, the County Commission and the State

Legislature. He had focused his efforts around building the strategic plan and aligning all other activities so that the District could be fully functioning by year three of the plan. Chair Parke stated that she had read his self-evaluation. She really appreciated everything that he has accomplished over the last year and added that she knows that he has left some things out that he accomplished. She feels he has done an awesome job.

With regard to the salary cap that was imposed by the Board in March 2025. That salary cap does not take into account that the BOCC has since approved reassignment of the executive director position to the Professional Manager 3 broadband class, and has allowed for merit-based pay raises to the position based on that broadband. Chair Parke made two suggestions to the Board. 1) move to accept Director Walsh's self-evaluation into the record and 2) table any discussion of an adjustment to his salary until the next Board meeting. That should give everyone an opportunity to read the self-evaluation and discuss salary next month.

Supervisor Tompkins questioned whether Dr Walsh requested individual supervisors to submit their evaluation on him. Dr. Walsh said no he had not done so; that at the recommendation of County HR and with the blessing of the Board in 2024, he had prepared his self-evaluation to be presented to the Board as a whole; he had been advised that this is common practice in relationships between boards of directors and the executives that report directly to them. He said that when he was hired, he was already a county employee, was treated as a transfer rather than a new hire, and in the confusion, was never offered an actual contract of employment. the issue of his salary and pay increases has been vague. He said that Special Counsel had advised that there was no need for a contract, provided that the Board and Dir. Walsh abided by Hillsborough County HR policies. Supervisor Tompkins requested to be provided with current salary and benefit package so they have a baseline.

**Item 17 Old Business** –

- b) Report to the Board of Supervisors, Fact finding report regarding Supervisor Betty Jo Tompkins's Qualifications to serve office – *Exec. Director Walsh*

Executive Director Walsh presented his paper report on the due diligence activity which he was directed to conduct regarding Betty Jo Tompkins' qualifications to serve office. He stated that he also was providing an oral summary of that report at this time.

He said that Mrs. Debbie Hunt, a member of the electorate, a rural property owner in the Durant area, and a self-identified member of Citizens Defending Freedom, had stepped forward to the Board at its February 2025 Board meeting with public comment, stating that she could not find any evidence of Supervisor Tompkins' qualification to serve office, and asking how Mrs. Tompkins could serve. The Board had directed him to do his own research, share his findings with Mrs. Hunt and report back to the Board at the next meeting.

At the Board's March meeting he had reported on his initial findings and concluded that what records he could find, dating back to the mid to late 1990s via Sunbiz and social media, did not support a history of agricultural production or of current agricultural landownership. The Board reached agreement with Mrs. Tompkins that she would bring her own evidence of her qualifications to the May Board meeting.

At the May Board meeting, Supervisor Tompkins presented an undated list of activities in support of her qualifications, but the list was not supported by any documentation or letters of reference. Dr. Walsh mentioned that Mrs. Tompkins' list claimed a job description for a job that did not even exist; the list included "Executive Director" of the Hillsborough Chapter Florida Farm Bureau; former Farm Bureau staff had shared that Mrs. Tompkins job would have been as "office secretary" because the Executive Director position did not exist until the late 1990s. Special Counsel Gonzalez had opined during the Board meeting that Mrs. Tompkins had failed to substantiate her qualification and he had recommended the Board take up a motion to act on this finding.

Dr. Walsh stated that one activity on Mrs. Tompkins' list had caught the attention of the Office of General Counsel in the Governor's Office as the only likely qualification on the list under Chapter 570– beekeeping. The Counselor in that office had told Dr. Walsh and Special Counsel Gonzalez that either

documentation would have to disprove Mrs. Tompkins' claims of qualification, or that someone would have to step forward who could reasonably refute her claims of qualification.

On October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2025, Dr. Walsh was informed by a senior official with FDACS that in the state of Florida you have to register as a beekeeper and that you have to have your beehives inspected annually. He was advised to submit a public records request to the FDACS Division of Plant Industry for a records check on Mrs. Tompkins beekeeping history. Dr. Walsh submitted a records request on October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2025, and on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2025, received a response from FDACS that there was no history of Betty Jo Tompkins ever having registered as having bees.

Dr. Walsh requested that the Board of Supervisors accept his report concluding that Mrs. Tompkins is not qualified to serve on the Board of Supervisors. He stated that the Board of Supervisors also needs to decide on their next step, noting that the Governor's Office suggested that the Board should make a formal resolution if it decides to move forward with a request to have her removed from office.

Chair Parke requested a Motion to accept Dr. Walsh's report. Supervisor Hoke made a motion to accept the report as submitted. Supervisor Runkles seconded the motion. Motion carried 3-1, with Supervisor Tompkins voting against accepting the report.

Supervisor Tompkins responded to the motion by stating that beekeeping was not the only agricultural activity in her background. She said that she was a previous owner/operator of organic certification business as well as an owner/operator of an heirloom citrus marketing business and former owner of forestry land in other areas of Florida. Supervisor Tompkins also wanted it noted that she feels this is nothing more than a witch hunt by Dr. Walsh due to the fact that she was hired as Executive Director instead of him when they both applied.

Special Counsel Gonzalez advised that there was a motion on the table to accept the report and make recommendations for the next steps in the process. Chair Parke called for a second motion to schedule a special session to take

place immediately after the regular Board meeting in December to discuss next steps. Supervisor Hoke made the motion; Supervisor Runkles seconded the motion. Motion carried 3-1, with Supervisor Tompkins voting against the motion.

**Next Board Meeting and upcoming events:**

December 15, 2025 @ 10 AM, HSWCD regular meeting, 4503 Coronet Road, Plant City, FL 33566

**Adjournment:** Chair Parke adjourned the meeting at 11:36 AM.

DRAFT