

**Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District  
Meeting of the Board of Supervisors  
October 20, 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)

**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:** Simon Bollin, Hillsborough County Agribusiness Development/AECD; Ellen Cruz, FDACS-Regional Director; Jeff Whealton, SWFWMD Agricultural Program Manager; Ken Griner, SWFWMD Farms Environmental Engineer; Margie Martin, Martin Communications; Celeste McLaughlin, Martin Communications.

**Public in Attendance:** None at this meeting.

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

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

**Item 7 Review and Approval of Agenda:** Supervisor Tompkins stated that she wanted to ask has some administration questions later on the agenda. Supervisor Hoke moved to accept this agenda for October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025. Supervisor Runkles seconded. Motion carried 4-0.

**Item 7a Introduction of Non Agenda Items –** Dr. Walsh advised Supervisor Tompkins needed to raise her questions now, so we know where to address her questions. Supervisor Tompkins stated she has some administrative questions that she wishes to have answered at the end of the meeting.

Chair Parke instructed Dr. Walsh to prepare his 2025 annual self-evaluation for presentation at the November meeting. Dr. Walsh acknowledged this direction and assured Chair Parke he would be ready at the next Board meeting 11/17/25.

**Item 8: Resignation of Supervisor Sullivan, Seat 5:** We received letter of resignation from Supervisor Sullivan effective October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2025. Supervisor Hoke moved to accept Mrs. Sullivan's resignation into the record; Supervisor Runkles seconded. Motion passed 4-0. Supervisor Tompkins requested we prepare a letter of appreciation from the other board

members thanking Aly Sullivan for her service and wishing her success in her future endeavors. Chair Parke requested a Motion to prepare the letter of appreciation. Supervisor Tompkins seconded the motion. Motion passed 4-0.

Chair Parke stated that we needed a Motion to Open and set a closing date for applications to fill Board Supervisor Seat 5. Dr. Walsh suggested either opening today with a closing date just before the November meeting or consider holding the application period open until just before the December meeting to give the public more time. Supervisor Tompkins stated that we need to leave that window a little bigger as we have had problems in the past in getting people and we need to encourage as many people as possible. Supervisor Runkles inquired if there was a disadvantage to waiting until the Dec meeting. Dr. Walsh advised no disadvantage to waiting and he agreed that we needed to leave it open until the beginning of December as time frame before November meeting is cutting it very close. Dr. Walsh noted that he has already spoken with one interested candidate, but the interested party is not sure that they want to substantiate their qualifications openly to the public. Supervisor Tompkins stated that if we are going to push out on social media, we need to give people that window of opportunity, because much of social media is driven by monthly – weekly publications. Supervisor Hoke made a motion to open the application period effective October 20<sup>th</sup> with a closing date of December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025, for Seat 5; Supervisor Runkles seconded. Motion carried 4-0.

**Item 9 Partner Agency Reports:**

- a. FDACS – Ellen Cruz – Ellen attended virtually but did not have a report to present.
- b. FDACS/OAWP – Vanessa Bauzo-DeLeon – Office of water – Vanessa submitted her report ahead of the meeting as she was out of the office. Dr. Walsh read the following Mailout enrollment efforts for the northern counties of the district continue – regarding the RAP, they have sent over 1,000 letters and have received over 200 responses. They plan on sending out a 2<sup>nd</sup> round of letters towards the end of October. FDACS also has a new Environmental Manager, Nicholas Zurasky. He will be covering those northern counties, and his predecessor was Tammy Hinkle. Nick’s email address is [nick.zurasky@fdacs.gov](mailto:nick.zurasky@fdacs.gov). Additionally, the regional portal is open and will close November 7<sup>th</sup>. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact her directly.

Dr. Walsh concluded by reiterating that the latest RAP program does not provide a nexus for our involvement, because it focuses on turn-key projects that are already well developed. However, the Board should be on the lookout to develop partnered projects for our area that would be eligible in the future.

- c. Jeff Whealton – SWFWMD Agricultural Program Manager: gave a rundown on the impact that the Federal shutdown is having on NRCS and their mutual customers, with a bit of background. Going back about 30 years, SWFWMD had a funded cooperative agreement with NRCS to deliver BMP-based farm plans, with a more in-sync application and approval process. Over the years, the agencies' cooperation drifted apart although continuing to deliver services [separately] to customers, in part because it is easier to service applications electronically. Some of our services are tied into our regulatory and funding processes in a way that prevents NRCS from contributing directly. Jeff highlighted SWFWMD's "Pro Mill" service as one example, and suggested this as an excellent service for the Conservation District to start partnering with SWFWMD as a customer referral service.
- d. Ken Griner SWFWMD Farms Environmental Engineer – Ken followed on Jeff's remarks by announcing that the new Fiscal Year's funding on October 1<sup>st</sup>, dove into the 75/25 average with some lower returns to the customer of 50/50. The key point being to refer customers to the SWFWMD FARMS program as quickly and often as possible. Please refer customers to Bob Meanson-Marley.
- e. Simon Bollin - Hillsborough County Agribusiness Development/AECD – Aly Williams is hosting a Greenbelt Properties seminar at the Extension Office on 10/21/2025, focused primarily on information suitable to new farmers or new landowners.
  - a. Friday, November 7th is the Florida Ag Expo at Gulf Coast Research Education Center; reformatted for the special occasion of the groundbreaking for the Center for Applied Artificial Intelligence in Agriculture. So that'll be something exciting.
  - b. Wednesday, November 12th, the Honor Foundation, Tampa chapters doing their trek. In the early class, they have two days where they go around and visit different businesses in the community and one of their stops for this class is Florida Coastal Equipment. This is not an advertisement for Florida Coast Equipment, but the group will be talking with the vice president of HR, and notably their current work force is 24% veterans, which is pretty high. Although they did not intentionally set out to do that, veterans turned out to be the best candidates, and they hired them.
  - c. Friday, November 14th, we're partnering with FDAC's Chef Justin and the Blue Star Families Tampa chapter, and on the 14th, we're having a lunch and dinner at American Legion Post-5 in Tampa, called Patriots Pallet, and it'll be available to 24 military couples, to teach them what crops are in season, and how to prepare quick easy and nutritious meals for their families.
  - d. Saturday, November 15<sup>th</sup>, at Clay Church Children's Museum, over 300 adults and military adults and children, Chef Justin will be doing a key lime pie Sunday for the kids at the Children's Museum.

- e. Wednesday, November 19th is the next Blue Star Families Nurses' Service event for Thanksgiving, and this has been going on for several years. Especially valuable now with the government shut down, military families aren't getting paid. The food is to ensure they can have a Thanksgiving meal, so I'll probably be reaching out to some of you in this room for any donations that you might want to make towards that effort later in November.

**Item 10 Minutes of September 15, 2025 Regular Board Meeting** - Chair Parke asked if all have reviewed the meeting minutes from September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2025. Is there anything that needs to be corrected. Chair Parke issued a Motion to accept the meeting minutes. Supervisor Hoke 2<sup>nd</sup> the motion. Motion carried 4-0.

**Item 11 Financial Report for September 2025** – Chair Hoke announced she has reviewed the Financial Report for September 2025 and does not have any questions. Chair 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 FY 2025 Annual Audit Letter of Engagement** – With regard to the Annual Audit Letter from Mauldin & Jenkins who presented at the last meeting. Total price for the FY2025 as a recap is \$14,500.00. Dr. Walsh is satisfied that we can meet the proposed cost and the letter of engagement is working its way through County procurement. Chair Parke asked for a Motion to approve pricing. Supervisor Tompkins made the Motion to accept the proposed letter of engagement at \$14,500 and Supervisor Hoke seconded the Motion; motion carried 4-0.

**Item 13 Stakeholder Survey** – Margie and Celeste presented their report on the stakeholder surveys. Dr. Walsh commented that the strategic plan has been developed in bits and pieces so it should not take long to assemble it into a coherent plan, and the state mandate requires that the Board adopt and publish its plan within the Month of November, so that it can also publish the first stage performance metrics by December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025. Supervisor Tompkins questioned the relationship between this report and the proposed fee amount from Martin of \$6750. Dr. Walsh clarified that the new amount is for the proposed assembly of the Strategic Plan. Supervisor Tompkins asked how many responses we received to the published draft over the last year; Dr. Walsh stated that we had received none via the internet posting, so he felt it was necessary to go to a targeted audience – the trade groups. Supervisor Tompkins stressed that as a government agency, we need to make sure that we are getting some input from the broader public, especially since our funding is from a government source, we need to make sure we have included everyone. Dr. Walsh pointed out that while the entire public has had opportunity to give input over the last year, the agency was not receiving input from core stakeholders who understand the mission (agricultural producers) hence why the stakeholder interviews; however, we will continue to make the strategic plan available for comment on the web. Motion to accept Martin Communications

Stakeholder plan and move to the Strategic plan. Supervisor Hoke seconded the motion. Motion passed 4-0.

**Item 14 – 15 Formally Direct preparation of Strategic Plan and approve Martin Communications’ Scope of Services Contract** – Chair Parke advised we needed a motion to approve the proposal to accept Martin Communications to drive the publication of the Strategic plan and publication of the performance measures. Supervisor Runkles moved to approve the proposal and prepare the strategic plan. Supervisor Hoke seconded the motion. Motion carried 4-0.

**Item 16 Supervisors Reports**

**Chair Parke** – reported that she attended the latest NACD webinar for grants; a farm bureau meeting ; and several zoom meetings specific to the scope of the strategic plan. Supervisor Parke wanted to state how much she appreciates how Martin Communications has worked with us to prepare this strategic plan.

**Chair Hoke** – reported that she attended the Farm bureau meeting and the Hillsborough County Fair Harvest Awards luncheon; the most recent Beekeepers monthly meeting. She also volunteered for the weeklong Florida Ag Venture, under her Rain Frog Ranch brand. Lastly, she is enrolled in the current Wetlands Naturalist Certificate under Univeristy of Florida’s Florida Master Naturalist Program.

**Chair Tompkins** - reported she attended Farm bureau dinner, and the Hillsborough County Fair Harvest Lunch and Dinner, a National Conservation planning review, Volunteer dinner for Hillsborough County Fair and the work day. She has set up conservation displays for the Hillsborough County Fair. Supervisor Tompkins wanted to report that the Hillsborough County Fair has approximately 600 students showing livestock this year and that includes poultry, rabbits, swine, sheep, goats, swine, dairy and cattle. Also wanted to mention that on November 9<sup>th</sup> she will be holding a Plant Auction and the money raised from the auction will be rolled into the mini grants she is offering through Florida Conservation Coalition, for children.

**Chair Runkles** – reported that she attended the Florida farm bureau meeting. She is also inviting everyone to the Lamb Show at the Hillsborough County Fair as the Farm bureau is holding the first Elected Officials’ Lamb Showmanship Class on 11/6 @ 5:30pm.

**Item 17 Directors Report** – Dr. Walsh noted that we are publishing a user survey on the website to rank acquisition of farm equipment, initially looking at three offerings – Cattle Squeeze Chute/No-Till Drill/Ultrasonic Flow Meter. The idea being to offer these services at

a low cost to our smaller and start up farms, because although these pieces are needed, they are too costly to justify smaller operations purchasing for their limited use.

Ultrasonic Flow Meter example – All agricultural water users have to track their water usage and calibrate their meters. If they don't then they get an out-of-compliance fine from SWFWMD. For those customers enrolled in SWFWMD FARMS, the cost is reimbursed at 100%, but for those who are not the commercial pricing can be very high. Dr. Walsh is suggesting that delivery of this service can serve two purposes – in the first, bringing the fees down to a more affordable level, but then also offering the opportunity to advertise to customers that the FARMS option is still available. Dr. Walsh is planning to promote the equipment purchases as a crowd-sourcing opportunity and entice participation by offering to comp donors on a rate basis up to the value of their donations.

Supervisor Tompkins – raised a concern for insurance liability for the Conservation District. Dr. Walsh said he had checked with Hillsborough County Risk Management, and as long as any rental agreements expressly include liability waivers for the Board and the District, then we should be in the clear; he proposes that he will work with special counsel to ensure that the proper waivers are in place with the agreements before we go into operation.

**Item 18 Old Business** – Dr. Walsh advised that he did not have any old business to report. However, as a reminder we have our By Laws and Budget meeting scheduled for October 21<sup>st</sup> at 10:00am here at our office.

Supervisor Tompkins requested to put on the record that she is hereby requesting a copy of the letter that went to the Governor's Office including all attachments. Dr. Walsh advised Supervisor Tompkins that the entire package is on our website but also instructed Dawn Chancey to print a copy of the entire packet for Supervisor Tompkins.

The other question that Supervisor Tompkins has is regarding Dr. Walsh participating in the Plant City Leadership Institute. Supervisor Tompkins requested to know who paid for Dr. Walsh to participate in the class – Dr. Walsh advised that although the fee falls within his fiscal delegation and the funds were reserved in the County budget for annual training of staff, the Board of Supervisors also had conveyed their consent at a previous meeting, and Chair Parke had approved this expense as well. Supervisor Tompkins raised a personal concern that the taxpayers were paying this fee.

Supervisor Tompkins also stated that we are a Soil and Water Conservation District and that we chose not to renew our yearly membership in the National Association of Conservation Districts in the amount of \$775.00. Dr. Walsh advised that her assertion was not correct - we have paid our dues for the National Association. However, there may be confusion, as the Board had chosen to table its membership in the Florida Association (AFCD), until that

association could justify what they would be doing with our money. There were remarks as to the lack of transparency with the AFCD and the Board had chosen to wait until more detail came from AFCD. Supervisor Tompkins advised she would find out and be ready to report at the November 20<sup>th</sup> meeting exactly what AFCD will be handling over the next year.

**Adjournment:** Chair Parke adjourned the meeting at 10:54 AM.

**Next Board Meeting:**

November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2025 @ 10 AM

Hillsborough Soil and Water Office – 4503 Coronet Road, Plant City, FL 33566

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