

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

November 8, 2024 @ 10:00 AM

Location: HSWCD Office/4503 Coronet Rd/Plant City/FL/33566

Supervisors and staff in attendance: Ryan Gill (Chair, Seat 2); Gretchen Hoke, (Seat 3); Robert “Myke” Morris (Treasurer, Seat 4); Aly Sullivan (Seat 5); Dr. Joe Walsh (Executive Director).

Absent: Supervisor McCullough (Seat 1)

Items 1-3

Call to Order / Pledge of Allegiance/Introductions: Chair Gill called the meeting to order at 10:00 A.M.; led the Pledge of Allegiance; welcomed attendees and asked for introductions.

Partner Agency and Vendor representatives in attendance: Simon Bollin, Hillsborough Agribusiness Development; On MS Teams: Amber Smith (SWFWMD Intergovernmental Affairs)

Public in attendance: On MS Teams: Supervisor-Elect, Seat 4, Tyler Barrett

Item 4: Election of Board Officers: Chair Gill reminded the board that new officers will be elected January. Supervisor Morris nominated Supervisor Hoke for Vice Chair and Supervisor Sullivan as Secretary. Supervisor Hoke and Supervisor Sullivan accepted their nominations. Supervisor Morris moved for a vote to elect Supervisor Hoke as Vice Chair and Supervisor Sullivan as secretary. Chair Gill seconded. Motion carried, 4-0.

Item 5: Public Comment: none at this time.

Item 6: Public Correspondence: HSWCD office had several contacts in the aftermath of Hurricane’s Helene and Milton. ED Walsh provided a summary of emails, phone calls and site visits related to impacts of Hurricanes Helene and Milton. The office or officers were in contact with Laurel Lee’s office, Hillsborough County Public Works, SWFWMD, and BOCC Commissioners Wostal and Miller. Special Council Gonzalez recommended a letter recognizing our role in aiding the County in helping the Ag community. The board instructed ED Walsh to engage with Simon Bollin to identify the District’s opportunities to develop storm related services to the community.

Item 7: Review and Approval of Agenda/Non- Agenda Items: Agenda was approved

7a. AFCD – Supervisor Morris reported the resignation of AFCD Ex. Director and that there are rumors that the Tallahassee political climate is favoring dissolution of AFCD and a transfer of its duties to the FL Association of Special Districts (FASD).

7b. Exhibit 1: Resignation of McCullough, District Seat 1. Special Counsel Gonzalez confirmed with the Board that any appointee to fill Seat 1 will not be able to take office until Jan 1, 2025. ED Walsh was directed to immediately put out a notice for 30 days “calling for candidates” to fill District Seat 1. The board will then vet the applicants.

Item 8: Minutes of Board Meeting October 4, 2024: Supervisors were asked to review the meeting minutes. Supervisor Morris moved to accept the minutes as presented. Supervisor Sullivan seconded. Motion carried, 4-0.

Item 9: Treasurer’s Report: Treasurer Morris presented the September – October 2024 bank reports. Treasurer Morris called out scriveners’ errors and confirmed with Eckdahl that changes that needed to be made. Treasurer Morris moved to accept and file for audit the bank statements and reports as amended for September-October 2024. Supervisor Hoke seconded. Motion carried, 4-0.

Item 10: Mini Farms Account: ED Walsh is in receipt of an FDACS-OAWP letter confirming that contract number 27691 is properly closed out and hence there are no outstanding FDACS liabilities against the funds

in the Mini Farms account. Chair Gill summarized the history of the Mini-Farms account for the new supervisors. Treasurer Morris moved that the Mini-Farms account with South State be closed, and any remaining funds be transferred to HSWCD's general account. Supervisor Sullivan seconded. Motion carried, 4-0.

Item 11: Hills 100 Account: Treasurer Morris moved that the Hills 100 account with South State be closed, with the following conditions: all remaining funds be transferred to HSWCD's general account and all outstanding student awards are to be reissued out of the general account, including awards to Leilani Francis, Niko Guerra, Jocelyn Rodriguez, Kyler Richardson, and Loki Asrael Martinez. Supervisor Sullivan seconded. Motion carried, 4-0.

Item 12: Envirothon Account: Treasurer Morris moved that the Envirothon account with South State be closed, and any remaining funds be transferred to HSWCD's general account. Supervisor Sullivan seconded. Motion carried, 4-0.

Item 13: Audit FY24 Engagement Letter for Signature: External Audit Engagement letter was signed by Chair Gill and ED Walsh.

Item 14: Lease Agreement letter for Signature: Lease agreement with BOCC for Springhead Fire Station, 4503 Coronet Rd, Plant City, FL, was signed, witnessed and notarized effective November 8, 2024 by Chair Gill, ED Walsh, Supervisor Sullivan, and Ms. Eckdahl respectively.

Item 15: Executive Director's Annual Performance Eval Letter: Executive Director's 2024 Annual Self Evaluation letter was reviewed by the Board. Special Council Gonzalez recommended that Dr. Walsh specifically ask the Board for any compensation adjustments that he thought were justifiable. Dr. Walsh asked for two things – 1) a 5% pay raise and 2) a reassessment of the job description and the overall compensations, in light of the level of exposure and accountabilities that come with the job. Chair Gill proposed to the Board that the raise for Executive Director be completed November 2024 and that a reassessment of the executive director's position be pursued with County Human Resources to be completed in January 2025. Chair Gill moved that the Executive Director annual self-evaluation be accepted, and the Board then authorize a 5% pay increase effective November 8, 2024. Supervisor Sullivan seconded. Motion carried, 4-0.

Item 16: Partner Agency Reports:

- a. **NRCS Report** – no report at this time.
- b. **SWFWMD FARMS program group:** no report at this time
- c. **SWFWMD Intergovernmental Affairs:** Amber Smith reported SWFWMD is involved in recovery operations. A Community meeting is being held at the Bloomingdale Library to brief the public and address questions. She added that there has been no reported additional flooding on the Alafia River in recent days. Chair Gill requested dates to be given to ED Walsh for these meetings. ED Walsh asked Amber about the Conservation District's ability as a partner agency to access GIS data. Smith suggested that ED Walsh would need to make a formal ask to the SWFWMD be added as a user of the SWFWMD's GIS data.
- d. **Hillsborough Agribusiness Development:** Simon Bollin briefed the board on the Blue Star Family event on Nov 20, 2024 to help feed 250 families that are food insecure, associated with McDill AFB. Local farmers will be donating to meet the need.

Item 17: Mandate, Qualifications Vetting for Supervisors: Chair Gill started this item by reminding the board that during their regular meeting in October, the BOCC directed County staff to find out what the vetting process for qualifying Supervisors to serve on this Conservation District's Board consisted of. Special Council Gonzalez took lead in presenting this issue to the Supervisors. He distinguished the Board's authority and responsibility for due diligence when appointing to fill vacancies mid-term, from the legal authority, which is not delegated to this Board, to ensure the due diligence process is done for

the normal election cycle. Although the question of due diligence for the normal elections appears to be a gap under Florida Statute, Mr. Gonzalez made the point the Board is being asked to document its vetting process for making appointments to fill mid-term Board vacancies, under its Chapter 582, F.S. authority. He stressed that the BOCC has gone public with its concerns for this Board having a clear vetting process, given that the BOCC has to ensure that its contributions to the Conservation District's funding is being properly spent. The inference has been made that the BOCC could decide to withdraw its funding of this District. Supervisor Morris responded that the Board did its due diligence to ensure that only properly qualified candidates were considered when Supervisors Hoke and Sullivan were appointed in October. It was acknowledged during this discussion that the Board had delegated much of the activity to Dr. Walsh to handle, that the vetting process had not yet been documented completely to satisfy external stakeholders. Special Counsel concluded his remarks by indicating that he still is communicating with the County Attorney's office on this matter.

Item 18: BOCC Storm Related Resolutions, SWC Role: see Agenda item #6.

Item 19: Director's Report:

19a. Settlement Agreements: the Two settlement agreements (Ercoli and Butts farms respectively) for outstanding producer payments from the FY 2014 FDACS Contract were signed and sent to State of Florida for execution, shortly after the October Board meeting.

19b. USDA Assistance Information pushes: USDA and NRCS information for disaster assistance was posted on our social media sites including Facebook, Next Door, LinkedIn, and our website. In the month of October there were over 50k hits on our website. Dr Walsh added that at some point he hopes to add a District Youtube channel in collaboration with the Communications dept at the UF-Plant City campus.

19c. Post-Milton disaster-related, submissions, calls and site visits: *see Agenda item #6.*

19d. Membership Fees: the list of membership and fees was reviewed by the Board. The Board approved the list of memberships, with the exception of a proposed Florida Chamber of Commerce membership. No additional memberships were recommended at this time.

19e. Community Liaison Position: Dr. Walsh announced that this full-time technical position has been advertised on the Hillsborough County website, Hire-Ag, his LinkedIn account, and the Conservation District's Facebook page, as well as having been distributed to our community stakeholders via email. Dr. Walsh encouraged the Board members to promote the opportunity to their contacts in the local agricultural community.

19f. Oath of Office & Fees to Dept of State/Election Office: oath of office forms and payment for Supervisor Hoke and Supervisor Sullivan were sent to the FL Dept of State/Election Office before the 30-day deadline.

19g. Business Cards: Supervisor Hoke and Supervisor Sullivan's business cards were delivered to them at the meeting.

19h. Supervisor Group and Individual Photos of Supervisors: photos were tabled and to be addressed at the next Board meeting.

Item 20: Upcoming Events /Other Notices

- a. FDEP BMAP meeting for Little Manatee River, Nov 13, 2024 @2 PM
- b. FDEP BMAP meeting for Alafia River Basin, Nov 14, 2024 @ 10 AM
- c. Agriculture Economic Development Council meeting, Dec 4, 2024 @ 2 PM

- d. FWC Commission meeting Dec 11-12, 2024 in Lakeland, FL. Time and venue TBD.
- e. Blue Star Family Event is there to help feed food insecure families on Nov 20, 2024.

Item 21: Next Board Meeting:

January 10, 2024 @ 10 AM, HSWCD Office, 4503 Coronet Rd/Plant City/FL 33566

Item 22: Adjournment: Chair Gill adjourned the meeting 1 PM

