

Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District

Meeting of the Board of Supervisors

August 18th, 2025 @ 10:00am

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

Supervisors and staff in attendance: Terri Parke (Seat 1), Betty Jo Tompkins (Seat 2), Gretchen Hoke (Seat 3), and Aly Sullivan (Seat 5); Special Counsel Tom Gonzalez; Dr. Joe Walsh (Executive Director); Brooke Saunders (Intern).

Absent: Absent / Vacant (Seat 4)

Items 1-4

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: *In person* Simon Bollin, Hillsborough County Agribusiness Development/AEDC; *By video-conference*, Margie Martin, Martin Communications; Andy Irizarry Rosas, NRCS Acting-District Conservationist-Plant City; Ross Dickerson, Hillsborough County Environmental Land Manager; Vanessa Bauzo, FDACS-OAWP; Ellen Cruz, FDACS-Regional Director; Troy Green, Hillsborough County, Surface Water Quality Monitoring; Ken Griner, SWFWMD FARMS Environmental Engineer.

Public in Attendance: ; Casey Runkles (Simmons Farm); David Royal (TNC, Cattle/Nutrient Management Consultant); Dawn Chancey (volunteering in assistance to Brooke Saunders).

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 moved to accept this agenda for August 18, 2025. Supervisor Hoke seconded. Motion carried 4-0.

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

Item 8 Partner Agencies (Introductions and reports):

- a) USDA/NRCS – Andy Irizarry Rosas, Acting District Conservationist – provided commentary on recent project approvals, for cover crops (9 contracts) totaling 1 million dollars, of which \$441,000 dollars had already been earmarked. Expecting a permanent District Conservationist reporting to duty in the Plant City office, with a

start date of October 20th, 2025. Andy also mentioned having received an email update from Walter Albarran regarding Joe's inquiry about the mobile irrigation labs. Dr. Walsh to follow up with Andy Irizarry Rosas.

- b) FDACS – Ellen Cruz; Executive Director – FDACS is working on a Block Grant from NRCS, 6 mil proposed to be dispersed throughout state of Florida based on commodities (workshop to prioritize dispersal, then to submit to USDA for approval) priority on storm damages dating back to 2023. She is out and attending meetings so please send invites for anything we need her to attend.
- c) FDACS/OAWP – Vanessa Bauzo-DeLeon updated the Board that cost share application period is now open (please direct applicants to website or to Casey Deuberry). Casey is working on enrollment efforts for the Springs funding program in Pasco, Citrus and Hernando Counties. She will send program info over to us for customer referrals in case Hernando County residents need to be redirected.
- d) SWFWMD – Ken Griner provided a list of completed FARMS projects (turf grass, strawberries); there is \$11,000 left in budget for this year and will receive the new budget for 2026 in October. Please promote to people concerned about groundwater/irrigation/Moisture probes/pumps. Dr. Walsh requested a template for services SWFWMD offers so we can add to our website. Ken recommended we use the brochures from their website. Dr. Walsh to follow up.
- e) Hillsborough Agricultural Business Development – Simon Bollin – The AEDC has decided to write a letter in support of Shogun Farms (appropriate regulatory authorities TBD) to allow a USDA certified slaughter (pocket) facility on their farm for the purpose of processing feral hogs, deer, etc; this would enable the farm to be a single facility for finishing, slaughter and boxing (creating a mixed land use). Ulele Brewery is partnering with Yingling, USF Brewery Arts Program and more. The local hops growing community is partnering with a malt facility from N Florida and our local craft brewers with the goal of crafting the very first all Florida sourced beer. Simon is putting together a list of certifications (Horticulture, specialty crops, etc) to couple with a potential 3-6 month paid internship, funded by USDA and cosponsored by Veterans of Florida.
- f) Ross Dickerson – Hillsborough County CELM is celebrating having been ranked 3rd on the FCT funding list by the ARC and will receive \$482,820.00 for the 109.41-acre Triple Creek Phase 3 project. Hillsborough CELM considers this tract to be a critical parcel in the wildlife/recreational connection between Triple Creek Nature Preserve and Balm Boyette Scrub Nature Preserve.

Item 9. Minutes of July 21, 2025 HSWCD Regular Board Meeting: The Board's meeting minutes from July 21, 2025, were presented. Supervisor Sullivan moved to accept as presented. Supervisor Hoke seconded. Motion carried: 4-0.

Item 10. Financial Report for July 2025: The July 2025 Financial Report and bank statement were reviewed. Supervisor Sullivan moved to accept and file for audit the July 2025 Financial Report and Bank statement for audit; Supervisor Tompkins seconded. Motion carried 4-0.

Item 11. FY 2025 Annual Audit Contract Status: Dr. Joe Walsh – shared that Chair Parke, Special Counsel, Hillsborough County Procurement and he had mutually agreed that the District's 3-year contract HCT CPAs (Ft. Lauderdale) explained the auditor situation, needed to be canceled under its "for convenience" clause. After performing poorly with the 2024 audit and returning with an initial invoice in the amount of \$28,000.00 on a \$6,300 agreed price, HCT asked to renegotiate the contract with conditions that are not allowed under procurement rules and for a price that the district cannot meet. Dr. Walsh has contacted three other auditing firms that are also on the State's vetted Master Service list, each of which came with referrals from local government entities. He anticipates all three will bid above \$10,000, which will require the Board to approve an award. Supervisor Tompkins inquired about specific conditions in the original contract and questioned whether we paid more than our original contract allowed. Dr. Walsh responded that "no, we only paid what was contracted for". Tompkins also asked why the price was so high, Dr. Walsh explained our situation will require \$10-\$12,000.00 for audit (Mauldin & Jenkins offered \$12,000.00). Dr. Walsh explained that under the County's rules he had to go with the lowest bidder unless he could show a compelling reason to go with a higher bidder. Attorney Gonzalez inquired if the auditor did not understand the amount of work required, Dr. Walsh explained he may not have been as strong as previously thought. Having no grounds to do otherwise, we awarded to the lowest bidder, and it became clear quickly that HCT had no experience working with very small government entities.

Item 12. Proposal to Develop By-Laws and Strengthen Budget Rules: Dr. Walsh commented that he and Special Counsel Gonzalez both have been concerned with the District Board's lack of by-laws and that he also has received criticism from various government officials in the same regard. He also pointed out that the Board must revisit soon its lack of commitment with regard to a published annual budget meeting. He pointed out that Hillsborough BOCC requires the Board's first draft of budget in January, which must be approved before being submitted to County Management & Budget by February. Supervisor Parke inquired on the Board's history of budget meetings and Dr. Walsh indicated he has found no records of past budget meetings going back at least 10

years. Supervisor Parke and Supervisor Tompkins suggested scheduling a by-laws meeting and annual budget meeting during the September Board meeting.

Item 13. Reopen Candidate Solicitation for Board Seat 4: The Board made motion directing Dr Walsh to announce the open solicitation for candidates for Board Seat 4 immediately, with a closing date of September 15, 2025. Attorney Gonzalez recommended including requiring verification at time of submission of applications. Supervisor Hoke moved to accept 4 weeks for applications, closing on September 15th, 2025. Supervisor Sullivan seconded. Motion carried: 4-0.

Item 14: Supervisor Announcements:

Supervisor Parke: stated she and Dr. Walsh met with BioSafe Systems reps Ray Austin and Jeff Kline (Ray is their agricultural irrigation field rep). They offer a peroxide-based alternative to other chemical water purification treatment systems, particularly to meet Dept of Health codes for produce, but also for water delivery for livestock. They told Supervisor Parke they also had already met with Kenneth Parker from FSGA. Parke believes it's a game changer for Agriculture, but acknowledged that we need to be careful of appearing to endorse one company's products over another. Supervisor Tompkins suggested to have them come in and present at a Board meeting. During Salute to Ag, Parke met Deborah Disney with Magic Microbes and is interested in these new methods as being aligned with soil health and limiting run off/leachate events. Supervisor Hoke also had spoken with Ms. Disney and commented on the potential benefit of Magic Microbes' service in connection to the BMAPS mission.

Supervisor Parke also reminded all board supervisors that board announcements should be relevant to SWCD.

Vice Chair Hoke: observed Florida Communities Trust's quarterly budget meeting – they reported \$10Mil budget report, Land acquisitions under Land and Water Conservation Fund program, Parks and Open Space, Florida Forever. Supervisor Hoke also shared that Horse Farms Forever's grand opening (in Marion County) is scheduled for November 13-15, 2025 from 5:00pm to 7:00pm.

Supervisor Tompkins: Supervisor Tompkins suggested crafting a policy to decide who and which businesses are being advertised on our website. Dr. Walsh agrees that we should create a policy to better organize how we deal with conservation, services, etc. Royals shared that TNC's approach is to promote technologies but not the companies and suggest that their consumers that each needs to do their own research. Attorney Gonzalez agrees, it would clearly be a function of the Conservation District to promote new technology and

create awareness, and it would increase website engagement, provided that the District is not seen as showing any bias toward a particular company. Dr. Walsh stated that before our next meeting he would look to draft a webpage policy.

Supervisor Tompkins revisited the District's past practice of distributing Conservation minigrants for schools to 4H/FFA and Boy Scouts in the amount of a \$250.00 grant, and suggested we needed to get back to that practice. She plans on attending Timberly Trust Labor Day picnic in Brandon and the Hillsborough County Harvest Awards Luncheon on October 9th at Noon.

Supervisor Sullivan: Supervisor Sullivan announced that she confirmed the next Hillsborough County Cattlemen's meeting is scheduled for January, 2025. She will confirm the actual date and report back to the Board. Board recognized a lack in communications with Association, but new leadership in Association in January may increase Conservation District's engagement with Association.

Item 15. Executive Director's Report:

- Dr. Walsh wanted to recognize and congratulate Jason Stewart (UF Plant City campus) for completing his Doctorate Degree.
- Dr. Walsh also introduced Dawn Chancey as our new Office Manager with a start date of August 25th, 2025. Dawn was in attendance in a volunteer capacity to assist with the meeting and in preparation for her new role in the office.
- He shared that today was Brooke Saunders' last day, as she was nice enough to stay on long enough to ensure this Board meeting was properly recorded. Dr. Walsh stated that he was writing a letter of recommendation for Brooke. Supervisor Tompkins moved to write a second letter of recommendation from the Board of Directors as well. Supervisor Parke seconded and the motion carried: 4-0.
- Dr. Walsh reminded the Board that he will soon be participating in the Plant City Chamber Leadership Cohort. He has been tapped to be the first to introduce a fellow student member; the overnight retreat scheduled for September 12th and 13th. Attendance for this Cohort is taken very seriously so he needs to prioritize his attendance for the scheduled events throughout the coming year.
- Strategic Plan – Margie Martin and Brooke Saunders have been interviewing leaders and staff of other conservation districts, with a focus Districts not on dissolution list and others who appeared to be offering their constituents interesting services. A key point of interest at the strat-plan level is finding out how the best districts keep engagement with their constituents.

- Cattle Chute – Dr. Walsh provided an example from Margies/Brooke’s/his interviews. The cattlemen’s assc and their veterinarians are expressing the need for a cattle chute rental to support the smaller cattle producers. Joe’s first interest is in an Arrowquip 7500, costing approximately \$16,000.00; high end price but very accessible and intuitive to use, as demonstrated by Brooke.
 - Regarding chute models and affordability, Dr. Walsh mentioned David Royals (TNC) had brought his attention to the Ranger brand at about (1/2 cost) of the Arrowquip; Dr. Walsh stressed he liked the features of the Arrowquip, but would need Board’s approval for that price tag.
 - Noted that there is a small grant available through NACD (\$2500) that Dr. Walsh wants to go after for this purpose.
 - Supervisor Tompkins made several suggestions regarding insurance; liability etc. as needed before offering the service. Dr. Walsh acknowledged, stating that he had already been in touch with Hillsborough County liability management, soliciting their suggestions in that regard. Dr. Walsh thinks demand is high enough that offering the chute at a competitive price should offset any concerns that users might have about extra conditions being in the service agreements.

Item 16. Old Business:

- Update on the referral of Supervisor Tompkins Qualifications to Tallahassee; Dr. Walsh clarified that the referral is to be directed to the Governor’s office, and that he had received confirmation from the governor’s office – Chief Counsel’s section. Dr. Walsh pointed out that the letter, as drafted by Special Counsel, refers to attachments, all of which are already public records. Supervisor Tompkins asked for clarification on use of the term “malfeasance”. Director Walsh and Special Counsel confirmed that based on the previous motion made at the May Board meeting, no further motion is required to proceed.

Item 17. Upcoming/proposed Business of the District:

August 14, 2025 – Salute to Agriculture @ Florida Strawberry Fair Grounds

August 18, 2025 – Board of Supervisors Regular Board Meeting

August 19, 2025 – Setup booth, Citrus Expo, Florida State Fairgrounds

August 20-21, 2025 – 2025 Citrus/FV Expo Florida State Fairgrounds

*Dr. Walsh working with Christian Padgett to possibly split employees/duties next yr.

September 15, 2025 – Board of Supervisors Regular Board Meeting

November 17, 2025 – Board of Supervisors Regular Board Meeting

December 15, 2025 – Board of Supervisors Regular Board Meeting

Adjournment: Chair Parke adjourned the meeting at 10:54 A.M.