

**Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District
Special Meeting of the Board of Supervisors
December 22, 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 9:30 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: *Via video conference* - Jeff Whealton (SWFWMD). Jeff contexed his attendance today on his interest in the District's Strategic Plan.

Item 5. Public In Attendance: *In person* - Mollie Usher; *via video conference* – Ryan Gill; Margie Martin (Martin Communications).

Item 6. Public Correspondence: Office Manager, Dawn Chancey, read email received on December 19th, 2025 from Margie Martin, Martin Communications into the record, regarding Executive Director Joe Walsh's 2025 performance. Excerpt from Ms. Martin's statement: *"believe that Dr. Walsh's performance as Executive Director this year reflects a strong commitment to the District, its Board, and the constituents served, and merits recognition as part of the record regarding his employment with the District"*. No other public correspondence was received.

Item 7. Board discussion of Executive Director Walsh's 2025 performance: Chair Parke requested a Motion to Rescind the motion from the December 15th meeting to table discussion of Dr. Walsh's performance evaluation and merit-based pay raise to the January 2026 meeting. Supervisor Hoke made the motion; Supervisor Runkles seconded the motion. Motion carried 3-1; Supervisor Tompkins voting "nay."

Chair Parke opened discussion with regard to Executive Director Walsh's performance for 2025. Individual contributions are summarized under contributor's name below.

Chair Parke - *"There have only been three Executive Directors in the last 40 years of the Board- Betty Jo Tompkins; Heather Thompson and now Dr. Joe Walsh. Since the previous Board allowed the Executive Director to submit a self-evaluation and at the recommendation of Hillsborough County Human Resources, this Board requested Dr. Walsh to submit his self-evaluation. Going forward, if this Board is going to require each Board Supervisor submit an actual evaluation of the Executive Director, then the Board needs to hold a workshop to set up metrics and standards in January, not at the end of the year. The Board will then need to present these metrics to the Executive Director so expectations are clear."*

Chair Parke continued: When in October, when I requested Dr. Walsh to submit his self-evaluation in November, Dr. Walsh did that, and there was nothing entered into the record that any other type of evaluation was being requested by the Board. Chair Parke shared her opinion that the Board cannot make changes in the middle of the year and not provide any guidance or metrics. During the November board meeting, Supervisor Tompkins requested to see Dr. Walsh's pay structure and that was provided by Dawn Chancey (at the December meeting). Chair Parke felt that everything that this Board had requested had been submitted by Dr. Walsh. Chair Parke stated that *"we are not tabling this merit-based raise until January and thus requiring Hillsborough BOCC HR to work outside of their guidelines."* Chair Parke recommended that this Board accept the merit-based pay raise of 4% and in January 2026 (if the Board desires to do so) it hold a workshop to set specific metrics for the Executive Director.

Supervisor Tompkins - stated that her issue from the beginning was not the self-evaluation from Dr. Walsh but that she also wanted a separate evaluation done by each member of the elected Board. She realizes *"the composition of the board is no longer elected as it used to be and there is only one elected person on the board of four."* Supervisor Tompkins feels very strongly that there should be a process where all supervisors are given the opportunity for input. Supervisor Tompkins pointed out that a scoring system historically is used for the staff level people working here. When Dr. Walsh raised the issue of missing evaluations, Supervisor Tompkins said

that her own evaluation forms (as executive director) were confidential and were not attached to any meeting minutes.

Supervisor Tompkins tied her comments to the Strategic Plan, stating that she felt the Plan's parameters and expectations are too low. The Board has adopted a strategic plan that basically says if you do one thing in a year, you have accomplished everything you need to.

Dr. Walsh - Dr. Walsh provided history and context to the discussion on using evaluation forms. He had contacted Hillsborough County HR last year for an evaluation form for his position and it was senior management at HR that "slammed on the brakes." Dr. Walsh was strongly advised that using separate evaluation forms from multiple contributors was ill advised and that it was customary for senior managers to prepare letters of self-evaluation for presentation to their chains of supervision, particularly where governing boards were concerned. Kurt Wilkening, Ivey Martin and Matthew Verghese all weighed in and advised to only use a self-evaluation letter from the Executive Director and delivered to the Board for its consideration.

Dr. Walsh pointed out that former Chair Ryan Gill was in attendance (today) and could speak to the fact that it was the Board's decision not to do an evaluation form but to accept a self-evaluation and then discuss it in open forum. Dr. Walsh noted that the experience was very humiliating and difficult for him to sit through, because the Board members made comments in front of everybody in attendance, openly discussing his compensation package, made the decision about his salary and then voted on it.

Dr. Walsh pointed out that Supervisor Tompkins is claiming a long history of evaluation forms and he wanted it noted that he was not able to find [district] record of any forms and nothing was attached to prior meeting minutes, with those minutes only confirming that motions were made to give her a pay raise every year. Dr Walsh further advised that Hillsborough County HR does not have any records of previous evaluation forms either (for any staff or the executive director).

Dr. Walsh made suggestions about timing if the Board decided it wanted to use evaluation forms going forward. An evaluation form needs to be ironed out by the Board at the front end of the evaluation period, and the previous Board did not do that (for 2024). Dr. Walsh shared with the Board copies of the form he had prepared and given to Dawn Chancey shortly after she on-boarded, noting that Dawn had reviewed and signed in acknowledgement of having received the form. Dr. Walsh also provided the same for previous employees Linda Chion and Katherine Eckdahl. Linda Chion decided not to live by the evaluation form and chose to resign immediately. Katherine Eckdahl stayed in employment and progressively got better reviews over a period of quarterly reviews.

Dr. Walsh pointed out that he did not have a contract of employment with the Board, and no protection offered to him by this Board in terms of his evaluation process and had received no performance metrics for his position. So, if the Board wishes to treat his position differently from other senior managers in the County, then he thinks out of fairness, and if the Board wants to operate with him in good faith, then the Board gives him its evaluation expectations at the beginning of the year.

Dr. Walsh offered for further consideration...in his conversation with HR Director Ivey Martin on December 17th, Mrs. Martin made it known that there is an existing County HR policy that applies to his employment the same as everyone else in the County. If this Board cannot complete his performance evaluation and make recommendations regarding merit based pay raises in a timely fashion, the County's policy is an assumption that all performance expectations were met as "satisfactory" and the budgeted merit-based pay-raise will be awarded on Hillsborough County's schedule without the Board's input.

Dr. Walsh advised Chair Parke that if the Board decides to schedule a workshop for consolidating a performance evaluation form for FY26, then the Board needs to consult with Special Counsel.

Supervisor Runkles - is in agreement with the idea of providing any specific evaluation parameters at the beginning of the year, and not at the tail end of the year.

Item 8. Consideration of an FY 2026 Merit Based Pay Raise for Executive Dr. Walsh:

Chair Runkles made the Motion to approve a 4% merit-based pay raise for Dr. Joseph Walsh effective January 1st, 2026. Supervisor Hoke seconded the motion. Motion carried 3-1. Supervisor Tompkins voted “nay.”

Item 9. Partner Agency and Public Comments: *Chair Parke offered partners and members of the public one last opportunity to offer comment to the Board.*

Jeff Whealton, SWFWMD: said it has been great working with the district. He liked the way the district is moving forward. Jeff wishes everyone a Merry Christmas.

Ryan Gill: “reiterated” Jeff’s comments; he appreciates the direction of the board and where it is headed. He wants to wish everyone a Merry Christmas as well.

Meeting adjourned at 9:51am.