



Chris Boles
County Commissioner
District 6, Countywide

MEMORANDUM

Date: Wednesday, June 3, 2026

To: Executive Director Joe Walsh

From: Commissioner Chris Boles *CB*

Subject: Inquiry re: Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District

Based on recent events in Tallahassee, as well as the budget materials and program updates gathered on the Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District (District), I am requesting a focused review to better understand how the District's current services and planned expansion aligns with measurable outcomes and overall value to Hillsborough County taxpayers. **This information is requested to be provided no later thirty (30) days to assist with the forthcoming budget workshops.**

There has been a significant shift in financial responsibility from a state shared funding model toward Hillsborough County serving as the sole source of financial support. The District's budget has more than doubled, increasing from approximately \$296,000 in FY24 to more than \$607,000 in FY27, with additional investments in personnel, facilities, and operational capacity.

While the information gathered highlights organizational restructuring, staffing changes, facility acquisition, and strategic planning activities, *it provides little evidence* of corresponding programmatic delivery, measurable community outcomes, or quantifiable benefits to the taxpayers funding those activities. As the Board is responsible for appropriating public funds, it relies on regular reporting and performance measures to evaluate the effectiveness of taxpayer-supported programs. Unlike County departments operating under the County Administrator, or other funded agencies that routinely provide updates to the Board, the District operates independently while receiving substantial County financial support. This creates a unique accountability gap that makes it difficult for the Board to evaluate performance, measure return on investment, and determine whether public funds are producing outcomes commensurate with the level of funding provided.

Of particular concern is that approximately 74 percent of the District's FY26 budget, and 83 percent of the proposed FY27 budget, is allocated to personnel expenses, while a significant portion of the remaining funding is dedicated to facility-related costs, maintenance, fees, assessments, and other administrative expenditures. As the District becomes increasingly reliant on Hillsborough County as its *sole source of funding*, it is reasonable to expect a clear demonstration of measurable outcomes, quantifiable community benefit, and a direct connection between taxpayer investment and programmatic results. While the materials document substantial investments in organizational capacity, they provide limited evidence that those investments have translated into conservation outcomes, agricultural support services, or other tangible public benefits commensurate with the level of funding being requested.

The purpose of this inquiry is to determine what measurable outcomes have been delivered, or are being delivered today; what outcomes are anticipated in the future and how those outcomes correlate to the level of public investment being made; and whether taxpayers are receiving an appropriate return on that investment. Additionally, staff should evaluate whether the services currently provided by the District are unique, necessary, and cost-effective, or whether those functions are being delivered more efficiently through existing local, regional, state, or federal resources already operating within Hillsborough County.

At its core, this review should answer a straightforward question: as County funding requests continue to grow, while at the same time revenue sources are shrinking, are taxpayers funding measurable conservation outcomes and agricultural support services, or are they primarily funding a continued expansion and administration of the organization itself?

CC: Hillsborough County CFA Tom Fesler

ATT: Evaluation of Public Investment, Measurable Outcomes, and Service Alignment Inquiry

Evaluation of Public Investment, Measurable Outcomes, and Service Alignment Inquiry

This is an information-gathering exercise to determine the following:

1. Alignment of Funding Growth to Deliverables

- Beginning with FY24, provide a year-over-year comparison of funding increases relative to program expansion, staffing changes, and service delivery
- Identify what new or expanded programmatic services the County is receiving because of the increased funding since FY24
- Clarify how facility acquisition, staffing reclassification, and operational investments have translated into service capacity

2. Activities vs. Measurable Outcomes

The District's materials highlight accomplishments related to governance, staffing, communications, and outreach.

Staff is asked to distinguish between:

- organizational and administrative improvements
- programmatic activities (# of events, outreach and engagement metrics)
- measurable outcomes tied to the District's statutory purpose

For measurable outcomes, any and all available data since FY24 related to:

- acres served, conserved, or improved
- water quality or soil conservation impacts
- agricultural support outcomes
- flood mitigation or stormwater-related impacts
- cost avoidance or infrastructure benefits

Where outcomes are not currently quantified, that should be clearly identified.

3. Clarification of "Accomplishments" and Performance Metrics

- Define what constitutes the reported "accomplishments" in FY24, FY25 and FY26
- Identify whether these represent outputs, activities, or outcomes
- Provide any existing or planned performance metrics tied to the District's upcoming Strategic Plan
- Confirm timeline for implementation of measurable performance standards required under state direction

4. Unique Value and Service Gaps

The District indicates it is working to “fill existing gaps in service” and expand technical capabilities.

Staff is asked to:

- Identify what specific services are uniquely provided by the District
- Define the “gaps” the District is addressing, with specificity
- Determine whether those services are currently available through other entities or could be provided through existing resources

5. Duplication and Overlap Analysis

Provide a comparison of District functions with the following entities:

- Southwest Florida Water Management District
- University of Florida IFAS Extension
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- Hillsborough County Water Resources Department
- Hillsborough County Environmental Protection Commission
- Hillsborough County Public Works Department

For each, identify:

- overlapping functions
- distinct roles
- whether the District is supplementing, coordinating, or duplicating existing services

6. Return on Investment and Leveraged Value

- Identify any grant funding or external dollars secured through District involvement
- Identify any grant funding or external dollars being sought by the District to supplement existing or future services
- Assess whether the District’s activities produce outcomes that would not otherwise occur
- To the extent possible, relate funding levels to outcomes or benefits delivered

Where a direct return on investment cannot be quantified, that limitation should be clearly stated.

7. Forward-Looking Commitments vs. Current Delivery

The District's materials emphasize future goals, including expanded technical services and a forthcoming Strategic Plan.

Staff is asked to:

- distinguish between current service delivery and planned future capabilities
- identify what outcomes are being delivered today versus those that are anticipated
- evaluate whether current funding levels are supporting demonstrated performance or projected capacity

8. Service Continuity Considerations

- Identify which services, if any, would not be performed in the absence of the District
- Determine whether those services could be absorbed by existing County departments or partner agencies
- Note any potential impacts to the agricultural community or conservation efforts

This review should clearly connect:

- ***dollars invested***
- ***services delivered***
- ***outcomes achieved***
- ***and identify where those connections can and cannot currently be made.***

The intent is to provide a factual basis to evaluate whether the current level of investment is aligned with measurable value and distinct service delivery within Hillsborough County.