

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

July 13, 2026

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); Matt Shivers (Seat 5). Casey Simmons Runkles (Seat 4) – absent.

Staff Support: Dr Joe Walsh (Executive Director); Dawn Chancey (Office Manager); Kylie Chapman (Conservation Technician); Raelyn Burr (Agricultural Policy and Communications Intern); Special Counsel Tom Gonzalez – *via teams*.

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: *In person:* Simon Bollin (Hillsborough County Agribusiness Development/AEDC). *Virtual conference hub:* Ellen Cruz (FDACS – Regional Director); Ken Griner (SWFWMD – Environmental Engineer, FARMS).

Public In Attendance: None.

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

Item 6. Public Correspondence: Dr. Walsh advised that the district is currently processing a public records request received by the office. The request seeks documentation related to financial transactions for FY2025. Dawn Chancey is working to compile the requested records and will respond in accordance with Florida's public records requirements.

Item 7. Review and Approval of Agenda: Supervisor Tompkins motioned to accept the agenda; Supervisor Shivers seconded the motion; motion carried 4-0.

Item 8. Minutes of the June 22nd, 2026 Regular Board: Dawn Chancey presented the draft minutes for the June 22nd, 2026, Board meeting; Supervisor Hoke made a motion to accept the meeting minutes; Supervisor Shivers seconded the motion. Motion carried 4-0.

Item 9. Financial report for June 2026: Dawn Chancey presented the June 2026 Financial Report. Vice-Chair Hoke reported that she had reviewed the draft

financial report with Dawn prior to the meeting and did not have any further questions. She noted that Bank of Tampa had waived the fee associated with ordering the District's new checks. In addition, she noted that both the Small Business Checking Account and the Asset Account are now earning monthly interest. During June, the Small Business Checking Account earned \$21.83 in interest, while the Asset Account earned \$1.41.

Chair Parke called for a motion to accept the June 2026 Financial Report. Supervisor Hoke made the motion; which was seconded by Supervisor Shivers. The Motion carried 4-0.

Agenda Amendment: At the request of Dr. Walsh, the Board considered reordering the agenda to move Agenda Item 11 before Agenda Item 10, as Item 11 was expected to be a brief discussion and could provide context for the subsequent discussion of Item 10. A motion was made and approved to amend the agenda accordingly, with Agenda Item 11 becoming Item 10 and Agenda Item 10 becoming Item 11.

Item 10. Invitation to AFCD Annual Membership Meeting 08.25.2026: Dr. Walsh advised we had received an invitation for the District to participate in the upcoming Association of Florida Conservation Districts (AFCD) Annual Membership Meeting. He explained that the District's membership had lapsed and that a prorated membership fee of \$250 would be required to rejoin for the remainder of the current membership year, with annual dues to follow in the next membership cycle. Dr. Walsh advised that the District currently has limited unrestricted operating funds and expressed concern about committing additional expenditures until the District's financial position improves.

The Board discussed the historical value of AFCD membership, including opportunities for networking, legislative advocacy, collaboration with conservation districts throughout Florida, leadership participation, and access to organizational resources. Board members also acknowledged the association's recent organizational challenges and ongoing efforts to revitalize the organization. Several members emphasized the importance of maintaining a presence in statewide conservation initiatives and ensuring the District has a voice in matters affecting Florida's conservation districts.

Chair Parke called for a motion to approve payment of the \$250 prorated AFCD membership fee from the District's Bank of Tampa operating account. Any Board Supervisors who are able to travel to the August meeting will be personally

responsible for paying the catered luncheon fee. Supervisor Hoke made the motion; Supervisor Tompkins seconded the motion; motion carried 4-0.

Item. 11 Budget Performance Report per HCBOCC Commissioner Boles:

Dr. Walsh provided the Board with an overview of his upcoming presentation to the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners regarding the District's budget performance and operations. He explained that Commissioner Boles requested extensive information concerning the District's operations, budget, and performance from 2024 to the present. Due to the Commission's ten-minute presentation limit, Dr. Walsh stated that he intends to provide a high-level overview while noting that the written materials submitted fully address each of the requested topics. What follows hereon is an overview of the situation he intends to convey to the BOCC:

Dr. Walsh will begin by thanking the Commissioners for the opportunity to discuss the District's work and the County's investment, noting that it has been many years since the District has formally engaged with the BOCC.

One of the primary objectives of the presentation is to clarify the District's unique statutory role and how it differs from other agencies operating within Hillsborough County. Conservation districts are established under both federal and state law to serve as the local sponsors for USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs. A key element is the expectation that Federal and State conservation program funds are not comingled with local government general revenues.

One major constraint on the conservation district that is addressed by the increased funding requests, has been the reduction of State investment in the local conservation program beginning in FY 2024, followed by a loss of capacity by the USDA/NRCS at the beginning of the Federal FY 2025 period. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) transitioned from county-based allocations for technical assistance to a statewide competitive ranking process focused on larger water infrastructure and water recharge projects. The Conservation District's requests for more County funding had been made in the context of those two reductions in service.

Approximately 81,000 acres remain in agricultural land use in Hillsborough County. Highlights will include the importance of pastureland for groundwater recharge and public water supply and the significant economic contributions of the county's strawberry industry and nursery operations.

Next will follow an overview of the Conservation District's interactions with FDACS, NRCS, the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD), the Environmental Protection Commission (EPC), Hillsborough County's Conservation and Environmental Lands Management (CELM) Program, and the University of Florida/IFAS Cooperative Extension Service. Over the last three years, Dr. Walsh has focused efforts at facilitating customer service from each agency to landowners based on consultations with each customer.

After 2024, the District transitioned from a primarily public outreach organization to one providing direct technical conservation services. Although Fiscal Year 2024 largely reflected existing commitments made prior to Dr. Walsh's appointment, Fiscal Years 2025 and 2026 focused on staffing, office operations, public accessibility through the District's website, telephone system, and email communications, as well as stakeholder engagement toward identifying a new scope for technical/conservation services.

Customer Service statistics for the period 2023 to 2026 will be presented. Over this period, the office has experienced steady growth in customer inquiries, private land consultations, technical referrals, participation on advisory committees, and technical deliverables. Beginning in 2026, District is actively providing assistance to NRCS conservation cost-share contracts.

The presentation will conclude with noting that Hillsborough County's investment in agriculture is primarily made through the Cooperative Extension Service and the Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District. He noted that while agriculture contributes billions of dollars annually to the local economy, the District operates on an annual budget of approximately \$600,000, representing roughly a fourteen cents per agricultural acre commitment. He concluded by reiterating the District's previous request that the County consider converting the District to dependent special district status, explaining that doing so could substantially reduce administrative costs associated with audits, legal services, and other compliance requirements, allowing the existing resources to be more effectively directed at technical conservation services.

Item 12. Partner Agency Reports:

- *SWFWMD – Environmental Engineer, FARMS – Ken Griner:*
 - Ken reported that current fiscal year funding is nearing exhaustion as the fiscal year comes to a close. He advised that while the operating budget is nearly fully expended, funding remains available for many agricultural

conservation projects through partner programs. He noted that additional funding for new projects is anticipated to become available at the start of the new fiscal year in October.

- *Hillsborough County Agribusiness Development/AECD/Cooperative Extension Service – Simon Bolin:*
 - Simon reported that the next AECD Meeting is scheduled for August 4th, 2026 and will be held at the Florida Strawberry Growers Association office. Dr. Walsh requested to be added to the agenda for the meeting.

Item 13. Supervisors' Announcements:

Chair Parke:

- Attended an MSTEAMS meeting with Dr. Walsh and County Commissioner Miller's office.
- Participated virtually in the NRCS' State Technical Advisory Meeting last week.

Supervisor Hoke:

- Continuing to work on farmland preservation efforts in Hillsborough County and has been collaborating with Horse Farms Forever up in Ocala.
- Recently met with Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation. Once again, Rain Frog Ranch will be assisting with the Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation Summit, June 1st- June 4th in Orlando, FL.
- Attended Polk County's 165th Birthday Cattle Camp Rededication with the Florida Women Landowners Association.
- Volunteered during the Florida Python Challenge to help educate the public about invasive species and Florida's native wildlife. She had the pleasure of hosting Matt Austin and the News 6 (WKMG/Click Orlando) and crew.

Supervisor Hoke also wanted to mention the newly released book, Regional Landscape Conservation Planning: Wildlife, Connectivity, and the Florida Model written by Reed E. Noss and Thomas S Hctor. The book highlights the Florida

panther least-cost pathway research that has helped shape conservation across Florida. She was especially honored that her family's conservation story was included, sharing how they saved their property from an eminent domain taking by the State DOT through application of the Florida panther least-cost pathway research led by Professor Daniel Smith. The book is a great example of how science and private land stewardship can work together.

Supervisor Tompkins:

- The Harvest Awards luncheon will be held on October 20th, 2026. Also, a reminder the Harvest Awards applications are still open until Friday, July 17th.
- Attended the Brandon 4th of July celebrations were held at the Hillsborough County Fairgrounds this year.
- Attended Farm Bureau Conference in Orlando, FL. This event was combined conference with Farm Bureau's Young Farmer and Rancher program and their Women's Committee.
- Accepted a nomination to become a founding member of the Rotary International Fellowship on the Environment.
- Currently assisting with the Labor Day picnic with Timberly Trust.
- Continued distribution of Florida Conservation Coalition mini-grants to schools, youth groups and individuals to conduct conservation projects.

Supervisor Shivers:

- Supervisor Shivers did not have anything to report.

Item 13. Upcoming Events:

- August 4th, 2026 – Plant City Chamber Candidate Forum
- August 24th, 2026 – Regular Board Meeting (NEW DATE)
- August 25th, 2026 – Assoc. Florida Conservation Districts meeting
- September 21st, 2026 – Regular Board Meeting

Meeting Adjourned at 11:10am.

DRAFT