

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

August 24, 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).

Staff Support: Dr Joe Walsh (Executive Director); Dawn Chancey (Office Manager); 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 10:01 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:* Andrew Kearse (USDA/NRCS – District Conservationist); Ellen Cruz (FDACS – Regional Director); Ken Griner (SWFWMD – Environmental Engineer, FARMS); Daniel Anderson (Mauldin & Jenkins).

Public In Attendance: *In person* – Matt Newton (Shumaker, Loop & Kendrick, LLP); *Virtual conference hub:* Michael Miller.

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

Item 6. Public Correspondence: Dr. Walsh reported that the District continues to receive public inquiries regarding the availability of a no-till drill for rental. He noted that producers are still experiencing difficulty locating a no-till drill for rent in the local area.

Item 7. Review and Approval of Agenda: Supervisor Runkles motioned to accept the agenda; Supervisor Tompkins seconded the motion; motion carried 5-0.

Item 8. Minutes of the July 13th, 2026 Regular Board: Dawn Chancey presented the draft minutes for the July 13th, 2026, Board meeting; Supervisor Hoke made a motion to accept the meeting minutes; Supervisor Runkles seconded the motion. Motion carried 5-0.

Item 9. Financial report for July 2026: Dawn Chancey presented the July 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. Dawn reported that the district's first check to AFCD for dues was lost in the mail and needed to have a stop payment issued and then reissue another check. Stop payment fee was \$17.00. AFCD has confirmed receipt of the second check which has cleared our account. Dawn noted that in preparation for the FY2026 audit, old checks from SouthState Bank and the first set of checks from Bank of Tampa with the District's name listed incorrectly will be voided and turned over to Mauldin & Jenkins for review and inspection.

Chair Parke called for a motion to accept the July 2026 Financial Report. Supervisor Tompkins made the motion; which was seconded by Supervisor Runkles. The Motion carried 5-0.

Item 10. Partner Agency Reports

- *USDA/NRCS – District Conservationist – Andrew Kearse:* Andrew reported that August 28 was the final day for obligations and that the deadline had been tight statewide. He stated that the Plant City field office was on track and that he had also assisted the Okeechobee field office with four contracts.

He reported a nationwide issue with Conservation Desktop, the software used by NRCS to develop conservation plans and maps. The issue affected the Conservation Products mapping tool and resulted in delays with some contracting activities.

Andrew reported completing seven cover crop field visits, three high tunnel visits, one prescribed grazing visit, one fence checkout, one urban high tunnel system visit, and one herbaceous weed control visit to address cogon grass. There are currently two high tunnels for one producer pending checkout, and Andrew plans to follow up with the producer after returning from training. He also received an inquiry regarding interior livestock fencing.

Current contract activity includes 44 existing contracts, 10 pending modifications, and four expiring contracts. One of the expiring contracts involves the two high tunnels scheduled for checkout.

Andrew provided an update on the NRCS reorganization. A reorganization meeting was held August 6, with restructuring expected to occur in phases. The first phase will involve changes at the national level, followed by changes

at the state and field-office levels. At this time, there are no changes affecting the Plant City field office. A statewide Florida NRCS all-hands meeting was held August 20.

Andrew also reported on recent training and technical assistance activities, including training on livestock watering systems. Howard Harrison visited the office on August 12 to assist with existing contracts. Andrew was scheduled to travel to Gainesville for irrigation water management training and return Friday.

Andrew shared a photograph of two cover crop species, sun hemp and cowpea. He explained that both are legumes that contribute nitrogen to the soil. Sun hemp has a fibrous root system that typically extends approximately 1–3 feet, while cowpea has a deeper taproot that can extend approximately 7–8 feet. He noted that the two species complement one another when planted together and provide different rooting characteristics that benefit the soil.

- *FDACS – Regional Director – Ellen Cruz*: Ellen apologized for being unable to attend in person but appreciated the opportunity to attend virtually. Ellen reported that there were no significant updates at this time and that things were continuing as business as usual at FDACS. She noted that Vanessa typically provides more detailed updates regarding cost-share programs and grants. She also provided an update regarding the federal block grant for hurricane damages from 2023 and 2024. The application deadline, which was originally set for July, has been extended to January. Funds remain available for eligible applicants. Applications for the block grant can be submitted through the FDACS website under the Block Grant section. She encouraged anyone with questions or needing assistance with the application process to contact her, and she would direct them to the appropriate resources.
- *SWFMD – Environmental Engineer, FARMS – Ken Griner*: Ken reported that they are approaching the end of the fiscal year in September and have utilized most of the available budget funds for agricultural projects. Additional funding is expected to become available beginning October 1, 2026. He highlighted that the cost-share program provides funding for Best Management Practices (BMPs) designed to conserve groundwater. Eligible practices include weather stations, soil moisture probes, irrigation automation, and fertigation systems. Fertigation projects may qualify for reimbursement of up to 75%. For the surface water

component, eligible projects may include alternative water supply systems, mainline piping, irrigation automation, and associated excavation. Ken encouraged Board members and staff to refer agricultural producers who may be interested in conservation projects, expansions, or new projects to contact him for additional information regarding available cost-share opportunities.

- *Hillsborough County Agribusiness Development / AECD/Cooperative Extension Service – Simon Bolin:* Simon reported that an agricultural pesticide collection event is scheduled for Wednesday, October 21, at the Southeast County Landfill in Lithia. The event is funded through the EPC Pollution Recovery Fund and will be the first collection event held in South County. The collection will be available to South County farmers from 7:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Planning is underway for the next Patriots Palette event, scheduled for November 13. The event is being coordinated in partnership with Chef Justin at Updax and Blue Star Families. The program is designed for military personnel and spouses and will provide an informal opportunity to learn how to prepare quick, easy, and nutritious meals using Fresh from Florida crops and seasonal produce.

Discussions are in the early planning stages regarding a potential food manufacturing workshop for military spouses. The concept was brought forward in response to challenges military spouses may experience when frequently relocating to different bases and seeking employment. The District is exploring a potential partnership with the University of Florida faculty to develop and test the workshop at MacDill Air Force Base.

The next AEDC Executive Board meeting is scheduled for September 3 at 2:00 p.m. at the Extension Office. The primary topic of discussion will be impact fees related to farm housing.

Item 11. FY2026 Annual Audit Contract

Daniel Anderson, partner with Malden & Jenkins, reported that he will have overall responsibility for the District's FY2026 fiscal year-end audit. He stated that a copy of the FY2026 Audit Engagement Letter had been provided to the Board. The engagement letter is generally consistent with prior years, with differences primarily related to formatting changes resulting from updated AICPA standardization guidance.

Daniel noted that the District's fiscal year ends September 30, 2026. The fee for the FY2026 audit will be \$14,000. He will work with Dr. Joe Walsh and Dawn Chancey to develop the audit plan, identify information and documentation needed from the District, and establish a timeline for completion and issuance of the audit reports. He noted that last year's audit reports were issued in early January and that the FY2026 reports could potentially be completed before Christmas or in early January, depending on the holiday schedule and the District's year-end activity. Adequate time will be allowed to review post-year-end activity and determine any necessary accruals to ensure the financial statements are free of material misstatement.

Daniel also discussed a new accounting standard that will affect the presentation of the District's FY2026 financial statements. The primary change will be to the Budget-to-Actual Schedule, which will include an additional column showing variances between the originally adopted budget and the final amended budget. Any budget amendments approved by the Board of Supervisors will be reflected in this column. Daniel stated that this will be the primary presentation change to the financial statements, aside from changes to the financial figures themselves, and that Malden & Jenkins will ensure the new requirements are properly implemented.

Chair Parke called for Motion to accept the proposed letter of engagement at \$14,000 and Supervisor Hoke seconded the motion. Motion carried 5-0.

Item 12. Vacation and Management Leave

Dr. Walsh reported that Hillsborough County Administration has requested that the District address the issue of management leave. He explained that Hillsborough County provides various types of leave based on job level. The County previously combined annual and sick leave into a single paid-time-off (PTO) bank, which employees may use as needed.

Dr. Walsh stated that the County also has a separate type of leave referred to as management leave, which is intended as an incentive to attract and retain employees in management positions. He noted that the District had not previously accounted for or awarded management leave because there had not been communication between the District and Hillsborough County regarding its applicability.

He explained that the County recently identified that management leave had not been awarded to District management employees and initially proposed awarding retroactive management leave for prior years. However, management leave is an

unfunded leave benefit and would be outside the salary allocation currently provided to the District by the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC).

Dr. Walsh advised that awarding additional leave affects the total number of hours available within the annual salary allocation and requested that the Board determine whether management leave should be included within the salary hours provided by the BOCC.

The County has indicated that management leave is generally awarded at 40 hours per year; however, Dr. Walsh noted that the applicable policy does not clearly address certain nuances regarding the initial and subsequent annual awards. He stated that management leave had not previously been awarded to himself, Dawn, or Kathy, and Hillsborough County is now requesting formal direction from the District regarding whether management leave should be provided.

Dr. Walsh requested that the Board create a formal policy decision and motion will be necessary to communicate to the County's Human Resources Department whether management leave should be recognized and accounted for within the salary hours allocated to the District by the BOCC.

After discussion, Supervisor Tompkins made a motion to table the management leave item until the September Board meeting and requested that a representative from the Hillsborough County Human Resources Department attend the meeting to provide additional clarification and explanation regarding the policy. The motion was seconded by Chair Parke. Motion carried unanimously, 5-0.

Item 13. Financial Controls (proposed changes for FY2027)

Dr. Walsh reminded the Board that a previous motion had been made to provide greater clarity to the District's existing fiscal controls document, particularly regarding dollar thresholds for the procurement of goods and services. Certain thresholds, including \$5,000 and \$2,500, had been increased to \$10,000 to reflect current fair market values and purchasing requirements. He explained that, after further review of the existing fiscal controls, he is proposing an entirely new Policy – Financial Controls and Budget document for Fiscal Year 2027 to strengthen internal controls and provide additional checks and balances. He clarified that the proposed policy was being introduced to the Board at this meeting and was not being presented for approval at this time. Introducing the policy would allow the Board 30 days to review and consider the proposed changes prior to taking action.

The proposed policy would establish additional separation of duties among the District's bonded officers and provide for greater oversight of financial transactions. For example, the policy would require two of the three bonded officers to review and approve certain actions taken by the third officer, thereby preventing an individual from self-approving a financial action. This would allow the Treasurer and Executive Director, the Chair and Vice Chair, or other appropriate combinations of officers to provide review and approval as applicable.

Dr. Walsh requested that Board members review the Policy – Financial Controls and Budget document in its entirety and be prepared to discuss and consider the proposed policy at the September Board meeting. He noted that any changes or revisions approved by the Board would not become effective until October 1, 2026, coinciding with the beginning of Fiscal Year 2027.

Item 14. Grant Writing/NACD Grant Status

Dr. Walsh reported on the District's efforts to prepare an approximately \$88,000 grant application to the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD). He stated that, based on information previously received from NACD, the District's eligibility for future funding may be affected by an outstanding issue related to a prior grant.

Dr. Walsh referenced a June 27, 2020 email concerning the District's FY2020 audit and a prior NACD grant that had provided funding for a Conservation Technician position. According to the documentation reviewed, NACD had requested repayment of the remaining grant funds. Dr. Walsh stated that the District returned a portion of the funds but did not enter into an agreement to repay the remaining balance. He further reported that, when he contacted NACD in 2025 regarding future funding, he was advised that obtaining another grant would be difficult. During subsequent discussions in 2026, he was advised that the matter had been elevated to NACD executive leadership and that input from NACD's Chief Executive Officer would be required. Dr. Walsh stated that he had attempted to contact the CEO by email and telephone but had not received a response. Based on the information currently available to him, Dr. Walsh stated that NACD should not be considered a funding source for the District at this time.

Dr. Walsh also presented information concerning a separate approximately \$20,000 advance associated with a Conservation Technician contract and a related FDACS

matter. He stated that the documentation indicated the funds were intended to be managed through a Hillsborough County account for payment of the staff position, but the advance was not received into the expected County-managed account. He referenced correspondence indicating that the FEID number associated with the transaction did not correspond to the appropriate Hillsborough County account. Dr. Walsh stated that he had been unable to account for the \$20,000 advance and that additional documentation was needed to determine what occurred with the funds.

Discussion followed regarding the District's prior grant history, including disagreement over the circumstances surrounding repayment of the NACD grant and the separate \$20,000 FDACS-related matter. A Board member stated that the District had previously received successful NACD grants and disputed aspects of the information presented regarding the outstanding balance and the District's status with NACD. It was also noted that personnel changes at NACD and FDACS may make obtaining historical information more difficult.

The Board discussed the importance of establishing a complete documentary record regarding the grant matters, particularly because the issues could affect the District's ability to obtain future grant funding. Chair Parke requested that supporting documentation be obtained directly from NACD, Hillsborough County, FDACS, or other applicable agencies. The Board requested copies of official correspondence, emails, account documentation, and other records that would establish the facts surrounding the matters, rather than handwritten notes or undocumented recollections. Chair Parke stated that the documentation should identify the agency representative responsible for the information so that the Board could follow up directly if necessary.

Dr. Walsh agreed to continue seeking documentation concerning the \$20,000 advance, including clarification of the FEID/account information and the disposition of the funds. The Board requested that any additional documentation available from NACD, Hillsborough County, and FDACS be provided for review at the September Board meeting.

The Board further discussed the distinction between the approximately \$20,000 advance and the approximately \$14,000 balance that has been identified as an outstanding or bad debt related to a prior grant. It was noted that additional documentation is necessary to reconcile the amounts and determine the circumstances surrounding the outstanding balances.

The Board emphasized that the purpose of the review is to establish an accurate record of the District's prior grant activity, outstanding obligations, and current eligibility for future funding. Dr. Walsh stated that staff will continue working to obtain the requested documentation.

Item 15. Supervisor Announcements:

Chair Parke:

- Spoke before Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners
- Attended the Plant City Chamber Candidate Forum
- Worked at the Supervisor of Elections Office

Supervisor Hoke:

- Spoke before Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners regarding the importance of protecting our working lands, and the role they play as natural infrastructure, including water resources, wildlife agriculture, and the long-term resilience of Hillsborough County.
- Continuing to work on farmland preservation efforts in Hillsborough County. Recent conversations have focused on how we can protect working lands without financially penalizing the farmers and landowners who keep those lands in agriculture. We are beginning to look at what a broader working lands preservation strategy or working group could look like, and will share more as that develops.
- Attended the AEDC meeting, as well as the Salute to Agriculture luncheon, continuing to stay engaged with our agricultural community and partners.
- Participated in an informational call regarding the new detected pasture mealybug and the ongoing response and resources available to Florida producers.
- Attended UF/IFAS Small Farms & Alternative Enterprises Advisory Committee meeting. We are working toward a Small Farm Resource Forum later this year to connect small farmers and landowners with available resources.
- Wanted to make everyone aware of two upcoming conservation webinars: 1000 Friends of Florida will host "Payment for Ecosystem

Services: A Conservation Tool for Florida's Future on September 2nd, focusing on ways farms and working lands can be compensated for benefits like clean water, flood protection, and wildlife habitat. Also on October 23rd – Corridor Connect+ webinar is offering The Flow of Conservation, focused on the connection between water, wildlife, conservation and working lands.

Supervisor Tompkins:

- Attended Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners meeting.
- Attended meeting for Harvest Awards for the Hillsborough County Fair.
- Attended Board of Directors meeting for the Hillsborough County Fair.
- Attended meeting for Operation Pollination.
- Attended Florida 4H Hall of Fame meeting.
- Attended State of Florida 4H Foundation meeting.
- Attended the AEDC Meeting.
- Attended Timberly Trust Board Meeting.
- Attended Plant City Chamber Salute to Agriculture Luncheon.
- Attended Tampa Bay Beekeepers meeting.
- Attended Brandon/Riverview Chamber of Commerce meeting.

Supervisor Runkles:

- Attended the AEDC Meeting.
- Attended the Plant City Chamber Candidate Forum.
- Attended the Plant City Chamber of Commerce Board Meeting.
- Discussed FARMS conservation projects with several farmers seeking assistance with fertigation and pump improvements and referred them to Ken Griner for additional information.
- Wanted to make everyone aware of two upcoming events: the Farm Bureau Annual Meeting on September 17th and the 4th Annual Elected Official Lamb Showmanship Contest at the Hillsborough County Fair on November 6th.

Supervisor Shivers:

- Attended the Plant City Chamber Candidate Forum.

Item 16. Executive Director's Report

***Office Phone:** We have lost our main phone line on the road and we are not getting it back. It's a very old antiquated line, and it turns out that we were the only customer on it. So while Verizon/Frontier was out there trying to determine which repairs were needed. The technician said forget about it and go find a new phone service. So we are pursuing just changing our office number to a cell phone with Verizon. We understand the importance of keeping the same number. We will update when we know more.

***Site Visits/Consultations** – We had a gentlemen call regarding the availability to rent our no till drill and that call lead to a site visit with a producer in the Balm/Riverview area who is interested in obtaining access to a no-till drill and potentially participating in a demonstration project, if sufficient funding can be secured. He noted that the District currently has approximately five or six potential partners interested in demonstration projects involving alternative forage and no-till drill technology. The interested producers are primarily livestock operators.

Dr. Walsh stated that interest in the demonstration projects continues to increase and emphasized that the next step is securing the necessary funding and acquiring the equipment so the District can move forward with implementing the projects.

***McIntosh Preserve Project Update** - Dr. Walsh reported that he had not yet received a copy of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) but understood that it had been approved by the Plant City Commission. He stated that he was working to determine where the MOU was currently pending so that it could be forwarded to the District for execution.

Dr. Walsh also provided an update regarding an engineering project underway at McIntosh Preserve. He explained that the City is working with an engineering firm to incorporate water-retention features into the property as part of a broader green infrastructure project, with the goal of improving aquifer recharge. The project will have an impact on the property's land management plan and the timing of the District's proposed activities.

Dr. Walsh stated that the District had not initially been fully informed of the scope or timing of the engineering project. Following a discussion with Lynn Spivey, head of Public Utilities, the parties clarified the relationship between the District's proposed work and the City's engineering project. Ms. Spivey expressed support for including the District in the project planning process, noting that the District's proposed work could help address land management and restoration needs associated with the engineering project.

Dr. Walsh reported that Ms. Spivey plans to initiate a broader project kickoff meeting that will include District representatives. The meeting will provide the

parties with a clearer understanding of the overall project, coordination requirements, and anticipated timeline for the District's involvement.

***Financial Budget Amendment** – Legal Services (10/20/30) - Dr. Walsh reported that the County will not provide the requested \$20,000 budget amendment for legal services. He noted that the request was a late submission and was considered a last-minute effort to address the anticipated legal services needs.

Dawn Chancey had previously identified approximately \$10,000 that could potentially be reallocated within the budget. Following further review of the budget, Dawn identified an additional \$10,000 that may be available for legal services.

Dr. Walsh reported that staff will continue to review and adjust other budget areas as necessary in an effort to identify available funding. Based on the current review, the District anticipates being able to allocate approximately \$20,000 for legal services on an as-needed basis for FY2027.

Dr. Walsh is in conversations with Matt Newton with Shumaker Loop with regard to what services they could offer to the District and at what price point.

***FOG Symposium:** Dr. Walsh reported that he recently participated as a speaker at a symposium in Jacksonville at the request of four organic growers who had previously met with the Board. His presentation focused on how small farms and working agricultural lands fit within the larger landscape context, including the importance of surrounding land uses and opportunities associated with conservation easements and ecological services such as water recharge and wildlife habitat.

Dr. Walsh presented examples of agricultural properties throughout Florida that demonstrate different conservation opportunities, including a property adjacent to conservation lands, a property located along the Santa Fe River, and an agricultural property in Hillsborough County with a county-specific conservation easement. He also discussed Sweetwater Farm, a community educational farm located in an urban setting in Tampa, as an example of how agricultural operations can function within different landscapes.

Dr. Walsh stated that the symposium focused on the financial sustainability of small farm operations and that his presentation highlighted opportunities growers may consider to support the long-term financial health of their businesses.

Dr. Walsh reported that he was offered an honorarium for his presentation. Rather than accepting the honorarium personally, he requested that the payment be made to the District. He stated that the honorarium will be deposited into the District's Capital Assets Fund to support the purchase of equipment.

Item 17. Upcoming Events:

- August 25th, 2026 – Assoc. Florida Conservation Districts meeting
- September 21st, 2026 – Regular Board Meeting
- October 19th, 2026 – Regular Board Meeting

Meeting Adjourned at 11:51am.