Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District
Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes
October 19th, 2026
Location: HSWCD Office / 4503 Cornet Road, Plant City, FL 33566

Board of Supervisors in attendance: *In person:* Terri Parke (Seat 1); Betty Jo Tompkins (Seat 2); Gretchen Hoke (Seat 3): Matt Shivers (Seat 5). *Virtual via MSteams:* Casey Simmons Runkles (Seat 4).

Staff Support: Dr. Joe Walsh (Executive Director); Dawn Chancey (Office Manager); Christopher Saley (Land Conservation Technician); *Virtual via MSTeams:* Tom Gonzalez (Special Counsel).

Item 1-4 Call to Order / Pledge of Allegiance / Introductions: Chair Parke called the meeting to order at 10:00am. Led Pledge of Allegiance; Vice Chair Hoke led the prayer; Chair Parke welcomed attendees and asked for introductions.

Partner Agency and Vendor Representation in Attendance: Andrew Kearse (USDA/NRCS District Conservationist), Simon Bollin (Hillsborough County Agribusiness Development/AEDC); *Virtual via teams:* Ellen Cruz (FDACS – Regional Director); Vanessa Bauzo (FDACS/OAWP Environmental Consultant); Ken Griner (SWFWMD FARMS Environmental Engineer);

Public In Attendance: *Virtual via MSteams:* Michael Miller.

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

Item 6. Public Correspondence: None at this meeting.

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

Item 8. Minutes of the September 21st, 2026 Regular Board: Dawn Chancey presented the draft minutes for the September 21st, 2026, Board meeting; Supervisor Hoke made a motion to accept the meeting minutes; Supervisor Shivers seconded the motion; motion carried 5-0.

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Item 9. Financial report for September 2026: Dawn Chancey presented the September 2026 Financial report. Vice-Chair Hoke reported that she had reviewed the draft financial report prior to the meeting and did not have any further questions.

Dawn Chancey reported two recent fraudulent transaction attempts involving the District's Bank of Tampa account. The first involved a fraudulent check in the amount of $19,000.00, issued to an individual identified as Roderick Jenkins. Although the check did not contain the District's correct information, it did include the District's routing and account numbers. The second attempt involved an unauthorized Intuit transaction in the amount of $97.19.

Both transactions were immediately identified and rejected through the District's newly implemented Positive Pay service, resulting in the prompt return of the funds.

Dawn Chancey explained that Positive Pay provides email notifications of questionable transactions, allowing for immediate review and action. Dawn advised that she has implemented daily monitoring of the District's bank accounts as an added precaution against fraudulent activity.

Supervisor Tompkins inquired whether the financial institution would pursue an investigation into the individual responsible for the fraudulent check. Dr. Walsh advised that both transactions had been rejected and reported as fraudulent, and that any further investigation would be at the discretion of the financial institution.

Chair Parke called for a motion to accept the September 2026 Financial Report. Supervisor Hoke made the motion; Supervisor Shivers seconded the motion; Motion carried 5-0.

Item 10. Partner Agency Reports:

- *USDA/NRCS – District Conservationist – Andrew Kearse:* Update on upcoming NRCS program deadlines, noting increased interest and application activity for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). He highlighted February 12, 2027, as the eligibility deadline and February 26, 2027, as the anticipated date for pre-approval announcements. He also reported that 15 deferral letters had been distributed, with 11 responses received.

Mulching Cost-Share Program: Andrew discussed the $50,000 annual fiscal-year cap for mulching assistance and explained that the funding limitation may prevent producers from receiving assistance for their entire acreage. He clarified that mulching assistance is generally a one-time benefit for a specific tract of land, although producers may qualify for additional assistance on different tracts. Board members discussed the importance of communicating these limitations to agricultural producers.

Field Visits and Applications: Andrew reported continued field activity involving high tunnel operations, prescribed grazing, mulching, brush management, herbaceous weed control, and wildlife habitat practices. He discussed a high tunnel operation in Lithia that experienced damage from Hurricanes Ian and Milton, resulting in two failed conservation practices requiring additional review and corrective action. He also reported receiving eight new applications during the reporting period, including requests involving cover crops, mulching, high tunnels, irrigation, and compost facilities. NRCS currently has 43 active contracts.

Upcoming Meetings and Events: Andrew highlighted the Hillsborough County Cattlemen's next meeting is scheduled for November 5, 2026 Dr. Walsh expressed the District's willingness to assist with promoting future agricultural events through its website, newsletter, and outreach channels, emphasizing the importance of receiving event information sufficiently in advance.

Pasture Mealybug Concerns: Dr. Walsh raised concerns regarding the continued spread of pasture mealybugs throughout Florida, including confirmed detections in Hillsborough County. He noted the significant damage occurring in pastures and questioned whether NRCS could provide assistance through conservation practices or mitigation programs. Discussion included the possibility of utilizing NRCS Practice 595, Integrated Pest Management, as a potential avenue for assistance.

Dr. Walsh explained that current state efforts primarily focus on monitoring the spread of the pest and evaluating pesticide treatments, with limited emphasis on mitigation strategies. He also noted that turfgrass producers

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appear to be experiencing fewer impacts, potentially due to differences in grass management practices.

Andrew agreed to investigate whether NRCS has existing programs or conservation practices that could assist agricultural producers in managing or mitigating pasture mealybug infestations and report his findings back to the District.

- *FDACS/OAWP Environmental Consultant, Vanessa Bauzo:* Vanessa reported no major updates from t he department but provided information regarding agricultural damage associated with Hurricane Isaias. Significant crop losses were reported throughout the Florida Panhandle, particularly amount cotton and peanut producers. Cotton growers reportedly experienced catastrophic crop damage, with losses estimated as high as 95%. Additional damage to agricultural infrastructure was also reported. FDACS continues to monitor the impacts on agricultural producers. FDACS has confirmed that its Agriculture and Aquaculture Procedures Natural Disaster Recovery Loan Program is accepting applications from eligible producers affected by Hurricane Isaias. The program offers interest-free loans of up to $500,000 for recovery of essential agricultural property and infrastructure. Additionally, our field services are still pushing through cost share contracts. As of right now, 72 are complete and 4 of those are in Hillsborough County. If anyone has any questions or needs more information, please contact Erik Moretuzzo.

- *SWFWMD/FARMS Environmental Engineer Ken Griner:* Ken offered a summary of the SWFWMD-FARMS program, highlighting their favorite cost-share items such as irrigation system weather stations and moisture probes. They also contribute to “tubular recovery ponds”, pump stations, pump filters, and the main line that goes out to the manifolds. They currently have a lot of strawberry projects under funding. As always, if anyone knows of someone wanting to participate in FARMS cost-shares, please send them Ken’s contact information.

- *Hillsborough Agricultural Economics Development – Simon Bolin:* Simon provided an update on the proposed Hillsborough County Livestock

Containment Ordinance, developed through collaboration between the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office Agricultural Unit, UF/IFAS Extension Office, and Hillsborough County Risk Management. The ordinance is intended to address recurring incidents involving escaped livestock, improve public safety, and reduce the resources required by law enforcement to respond to these situations. The proposed ordinance would establish a progressive enforcement process for livestock owners who repeatedly fail to properly maintain fencing and contain their animals. The process would begin with a verbal warning, followed by a written warning and potential fines for subsequent violations within a specified period, believed to be three years. Exceptions would be considered for circumstances beyond the livestock owner's control, such as vehicle accidents that damage fencing or other unforeseen events.

This is scheduled for its first reading before the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC), with a second reading anticipated in December 2026 and a potential final vote in January 2027. If approved, the ordinance was expected to become effective immediately, although the effective date had not been confirmed.

Item 11. FY2027 Budget Authorization and Recommendations: Dr. Walsh presented the FY2027 budget, noting that Hillsborough County had made minor adjustments, including additional funding for fuel and maintenance expenses associated with the anticipated delivery of the District's Ford F-150.

Dawn Chancey has made some internal budget adjustments to accommodate anticipated legal expenses totaling $20,000. These funds were reallocated across multiple budget line items, primarily utilizing funds previously reserved due to staffing uncertainties. He noted that these adjustments were carefully evaluated following the hiring of the District's additional technical staff, while ensuring sufficient funding remained available for operational needs.

Dr. Walsh advised that the budget included a modest increase in annual auditing fees, consistent with previously communicated costs. He emphasized that the internal reallocations would not impact the County's overall budget management, as the

District is recognized under a single project code. The detailed budget format serves as an internal financial management tool to assist the District in monitoring and allocating expenditures.

Chair Parke made a motion to approve District's FY 2027 budget authorization and recommendations of $662,657.00. Supervisor Runkles seconded the motion. Motion passed 5-0.

Due to Supervisor Runkles need to depart early for a prior commitment, Dr. Walsh presented Vice Chair Gretchen Hoke and Supervisor Casey Simmons Runkles with Certificates of Appreciation in recognition of their dedicated service and contributions to the Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District. Dr. Walsh noted that this would be their final official Board meeting as both Supervisors' terms were scheduled to expire November 3rd, 2026.

Item 12. Financial Controls (proposed changes for FY2027): Dr. Walsh presented the proposed revisions to the District's Fiscal Controls Policy, explaining that the updated procedures were designed to strengthen financial oversight, accountability, and internal checks and balances among the District's bonded officers. He noted that previous revisions primarily addressed expenditure authorization thresholds, while the proposed changes establish additional review and approval requirements to ensure that no individual officer independently authorizes and validates their own financial transactions.

Dr. Walsh explained that the proposed controls would require review by another bonded officer, depending on the transaction amount and the officers involved. These additional safeguards are intended to provide greater transparency and accountability in the expenditure, approval, and reporting of District funds.

Supervisor Tompkins questioned the timing of the vote, given the upcoming changes in Board membership and suggested that consideration be postponed until the newly appointed Supervisors could participate in the decision. Dr. Walsh emphasized that the proposed policy had originally been distributed to Board members in August 2026 and that implementation was important to coincide with the FY2027 budget. He further noted that postponing approval could leave the District operating without the enhanced financial controls for several additional months.

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Dr. Walsh also advised that stronger financial oversight procedures would help address concerns expressed by potential grant funding organizations, including the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), regarding the District's financial management practices and accountability and reiterated the importance of establishing the revised fiscal controls promptly to support implementation of the FY2027 budget and strengthen the District's overall financial accountability.

Chair Parke called for a Motion to approve the Financial Controls. Supervisor Shivers seconded the motion. Motion passed 5-0.

Item 13. Hillsborough BOCC Inter-Local Agreement with District: Dr. Walsh provided an update on the proposed Interlocal Agreement between the Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District and the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC). He advised that, following the review and development of the District's Performance Measures and Standards document, which incorporated input from comparable agencies, the Hillsborough County Attorney's Office requested a meeting to discuss the proposed terms of the Interlocal Agreement.

Dr. Walsh explained that the County initially anticipated presenting the agreement to the BOCC for a first reading in November 2026, with final consideration and approval scheduled for December 2026. However, scheduling conflicts within the County Attorney's Office had delayed the initial discussions, potentially impacting the proposed timeline.

Dr. Walsh emphasized the importance of recognizing the District's Board of Supervisors as the governing authority of the District, rather than the Executive Director. He recommended that the Board formally designate Chair Terri Parke as its authorized representative during preliminary discussions and negotiations with the County Attorney's Office. Dr. Walsh would continue participating in these discussions to provide technical and operational information as needed.

Dr. Walsh further explained that, following consultation with the District's Special Counsel, Tom Gonzalez, designating a single Board representative would facilitate discussions while maintaining compliance with Florida's Government-in-the-Sunshine Law.

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During the discussion, Board members emphasized that the Chair's designation would be limited to representing the Board during preliminary negotiations and would not authorize her to independently approve or execute an agreement. Any proposed Interlocal Agreement would be presented to the full Board of Supervisors for review, consideration, and formal approval before proceeding.

Proposed Board Action: A motion was requested to designate Chair Terri Parke as the Board of Supervisors' authorized representative and spokesperson in negotiations concerning the proposed Interlocal Agreement between the Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District and the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners, with the understanding that any proposed agreement must be brought back before the full Board for consideration and approval.

Vice Chair Hoke called for a motion to designate Chair Terri Parke as the Board of Supervisors' authorized representative and spokesperson in negotiations concerning the proposed Interlocal Agreement between the Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District and the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC), with Executive Director Dr. Joseph Walsh participating as the District's technical advisor. Any proposed agreement resulting from these negotiations must be presented to the full Board of Supervisors for final consideration and approval.

Supervisor Shivers seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously, 4-0.

Supervisor Runkles departed the meeting at 11:30am

Item 14. Supervisor Announcements:

Chair Parke:

- Attended Transect Planning & Connectivity – Beyond the Corridor Meeting.
- Attended Working Lands & Land maker Leadership Meeting.
- Attended Farmland Preservation Meeting.
- Attended Conservation that Connects Meeting.

Supervisor Hoke:

- Worked with Crenel Francis at USDA/NRCS to help a Hillsborough County constituent whose family owns approximately 300 acres in Levy County connect with the conservation easement application process.

- Attended the Hillsborough County Farm Bureau meeting, where she was appointed to its Board of Directors.
- Participated in two webinars with 1000 Friends of Florida and helped review community mini-grant applications for the Tampa Bay Estuary Program, where the need for additional representation from Pasco and Manatee counties was discussed.
- Attended and Tabled at the Living with Wildlife workshop at Archbold Biological Station and Buck Island Ranch, representing the Florida Women Landowners Association.
- Attended the annual Florida Cracker Horse and Cattle Sale in Webster, continuing to build relationships with the Florida Cracker Cattle Assocation and learning more about preserving Florida's heritage livestock. She participated in conservation camping at Paynes Prairie with American Daughters of Conservation, where they observed native wildlife, habitats, and longleaf pine restoration efforts.
- Continued working with the Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation on landowner engagement and planning for 2027 Corridor Connect Summit. She also participated in the Modern Farming podcast with the Green Jean Foundation, discussing agriculture and conservation.

Supervisor Tompkins:

- Wrote articles for the In The Field magazine.
- Interviewed for mosquito borne dengue fever.
- Participated in the University of Florida's and FAS Dinner of Distinction in Gainesville, FL.
- Attended Florida 4-H Foundation meeting
- Participated in Hillsborough County Fair Board Meeting
- Continued work as co-chair of 2026 Harvest Awards
- Participated in Timberly Trust annual meeting and was re-elected as Board Secretary.
- Attended Hillsborough County 4-H Foundation meeting and Tampa Bay Beekeepers meeting
- Continued work on Hillsborough County Fair ag/conservation youth contests, exhibits and Super Plant auction.
- Distributed youth conservation mini-grants to individuals and groups.
- Participated in Rotary Conservation event.

Supervisor Runkles:

- Supervisor Runkles departed the meeting at 11:30 a.m., prior to having the opportunity to present her announcements.

Supervisor Shivers:

- Nothing to report this month.

Item 15. Executive Director's Report:

Ford F-150 Update: The District has not yet received its new Ford F-150 truck. Hillsborough County Fleet Management has indicated that delivery is anticipated in the near future; however, no confirmed delivery date has been provided.

New Computer Assignments: Hillsborough County will be issuing replacement computers for the District's Executive Director, Office Manager, Land Conservation Technician, and intern positions. The existing computers have reached the end of their warranty periods and will be returned to the County upon receipt of the replacement equipment.

NRCS Virtual Desktop: Dr. Walsh provided an update on the NRCS Virtual Desktop system, explaining that access is essential for District technical staff to support NRCS programs, including cost-share evaluations, due diligence, site inspections, and other conservation activities. He reported ongoing technical difficulties involving computer compatibility and connectivity within the District office. Hillsborough County and NRCS continue to work collaboratively toward a resolution. Kye Chapman has been assisting with testing and troubleshooting, while Chris Saley's participation has been postponed pending resolution of the technical issues. Dr. Walsh noted that one potential solution may require technical staff to utilize two separate computers, one provided by NRCS and another by Hillsborough County. No final determination has been made.

Schedule of Staff Evaluations: Kye Chapman recently completed her probationary performance evaluation and successfully concluded her probationary period. He further advised that Chris Saley's baseline performance evaluation has been completed and provided to him. Due to his recent employment start date, Mr. Saley will not be required to complete a year-end evaluation. Dr. Walsh also indicated that he will begin preparing his own self-evaluation for presentation during the following month.

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Ag Venture Recap: We participated in Ag Venture for the first time in several years, hosting an educational station staffed by Kye Chapman and Chris Saley. The District received positive feedback regarding its participation and student engagement.

The original educational activity was designed to demonstrate the importance of healthy soil and regenerative agricultural practices by comparing plant growth under varying soil conditions, ranging from bare sand to enriched potting soil. However, heavy rainfall prior to the event damaged the plants, requiring staff to implement an alternative interactive activity involving water cycle bracelets.

Chris added that, following initial adjustments on the first day, the water cycle activity was extremely well received, with several students identifying the District's station as their favorite. Educational coloring sheets were also distributed, and an additional coloring sheet incorporating the District's logo was developed in response to student interest.

The District accommodated a request from the Farm Bureau to provide additional staffing assistance during the second week of Ag Venture, allowing for continuity of the educational activities and emphasized the importance of advance planning, well-prepared educational materials, and careful consideration of staffing commitments when participating in multi-day outreach events to ensure the District's other operational responsibilities are maintained.

Overall, our participation was considered successful and provided a valuable opportunity to educate students about soil health, water conservation, and environmental stewardship.

Item 16. Upcoming/Proposed Business of the District:

- November 5th, 2026: Hillsborough County Cattlemen's Meeting
- November 16th, 2026: Regular Board Meeting
- November 17th, 2026: AEDC Meeting
- December 14th, 2026: Regular Board Meeting

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