

**Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District**

**Meeting of the Board of Supervisors**

**August 8, 2024 @ 2:00 PM**

**Location: HSWCD Office/4503 Coronet Rd/Plant City/FL/33566**

**Supervisors and staff in attendance:** Ryan Gill (Chair, Seat 2); Robert “Myke” Morris (Treasurer, Seat 4); Mark Proctor (Seat 5); Dr. Joe Walsh (HSWCD Executive Director); Kathy Eckdahl (HSWCD Staff), Supervisor McCullough (Seat 1) arrived 2:50 pm.

**Absent:** Adam Young (Vice Chair, Seat 3); Michael Wells, Hamilton & Associates, CPA; Tom Gonzalez (Special Counsel to HSWCD Board)

*Items 1-3*

**Call to Order / Pledge of Allegiance/Introductions:** Chair Gill called the meeting to order at 2:11 p.m.; Chair Gill announced the resignation of Adam Young, Vice Chair, Seat 3. Young resigned due to family issues. The resignation is effective as of Aug 8, 2024. Gill led the Pledge of Allegiance; welcomed attendees and asked for introductions.

**Partner Agency and Vendor representatives in attendance:** Ellen Cruz (Regional Director of FL Dept of Ag and Consumer Services) on MS Teams, Simon Bollin (Hillsborough Agriculture Economic Development), Carolina Luciano Ramos (Soil Conservationist – NRCS); Kaitlyn O’Conner (Homegrown Hillsborough, Hillsborough Representative), Amber Smith (SWFWMD Intergovernmental Affairs)

**Public in attendance:** Betty Jo Tompkins (public), Tyler Barrett (public)

**Item4: Public Comment:** None at this time.

**Item 5: Public Correspondence:** None at this time.

**Item 6: Review and Approval of Agenda/Non- Agenda Items:** Agenda was approved Supervisor Morris to add AFCD Board Report #13A. ED Walsh to add: 13B: Lease Agreement, 13C: Auditor General Letter, 13D: Reconciliation of Mini Farms Account

**Item 7, Minutes of Special Meeting June 20, 2024** were reviewed. Supervisor Proctor moved to accept the minutes as presented. Supervisor Morris seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

**Item 8: Amendment to November 16, 2023 Meeting Minutes:**

Supervisor Morris moved to approve the amended minutes to clarify the purpose of the November 3, 2023 meeting. Supervisor Proctor seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

**Item 9: Partner Agency Reports:**

- a. NRCS Report from Carolina Luciano Ramos Soil Conservationist NRCS, Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) has 12 contracts worth over a million dollars. The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) has 9 contracts. Area 3: obligated 219 contracts for a total of \$15.9 million dollars. NRCS is actively collecting applications for their programs for FY2025.
- b. SWFWMD FARMS program group: no report at this time.
- c. Hillsborough Agribusiness Development: Bollin reported there will be an Ag Business meeting

Aug 13 at FL Strawberry Growers Association Event Center. Florida brewers (hop/beer) have developed a Check Off program, the 1<sup>st</sup> in the Nation. Check off program is a self-tax of \$0.10 for each barrel of beer. ED Walsh asked how the Check Off program is different from FL Wine excise tax. The Check Off program is “a self-imposed funding source” used for research and development for each commodity that has the Checklist.

Amber Smith (SWFWMD) related that SWFWMD is actively checking high water marks in the aftermath of Hurricane Debby and are soliciting additional locations from the public to be reported. ED Walsh expressed interest in the opportunity for mitigation strategy. Explained there was no agricultural base in the Mitigation Strategy. Bollin said he would be a resource on this. ED Walsh will follow up with Simon Bollin and Amber Smith.

Ellen Cruz (Regional Director of FL Dept of Ag and Consumer Services) reminded the Board of the Natural Disaster Recovery Loan program. The Loan Program will help producers that have sustained damage due to Hurricane Debby. The program will provide producers with an interest free or low interest loan for up to \$500,000 dollars to help producers help remove debris and fix greenhouses.

The idea of “Conservation Corners” for the website was proposed to include breaking news from NRCS, SWFWMD, FDAS, UF/IFAS (Extension Office) and Homegrown Hillsborough. ED Walsh was asked to pursue this proposal for the website.

**Item 10: Treasurer’s Report:** Treasurer Morris presented a triple monthly report (May, June, July 2024). ED Walsh reported that there is a sub account for audits from Hillsborough County. This account paid the audit fees for FY2023. Treasurer Morris reported that HSWCD bank statements reconcile, but HSWCD bank account does not reconcile with FDACS. ED Walsh reported that bank records for the mini farms account were requested from FY2014-FY2024 per the County Clerk’s office declaring 10 years is the length of time to keep records. ED Walsh reported that HSWCD staff is examining bank records, agenda, minutes and other important documents. ED Walsh explained that HSWCD is missing documents from 2023-2014 as presented to the Board of Supervisors.

The Board expressed concern about the outstanding checks still present in the Hillsborough 100 account. Treasurer Morris moved that the issue of outstanding checks be revisited at a later board meeting. Supervisor Proctor seconded. Motion carried: 4-0.

Chair Gill requested a letter from FDACS expressing that the \$12,768.48 from the mini-farms account is HSWCD’s property to do with as needed. Assigned to Dr Walsh for Chair Gill signature.

Morris moved that the financial report as presented to be filed for audit. Supervisor Proctor seconded. Motion carried. 4-0.

### **Item 11: Director’s Report**

- a. **HCBOCC procurement for FY24 Audit Services:** ED Walsh reported that the requisition had been filed to the County Adm for procurement of CPA services for 3 years of audits. The total amount for the 3-year contract is \$27,000. Under the County Procurement the Board will not need to convene a selection committee. The proposed schedule for the FY2024 audit timeline anticipates completion by Jan/Feb of 2025.
- b. **Special Counsel Report:** ED Walsh filled in for Special Counsel Tom Gonzalez. Dr. Walsh anticipates a meeting between Special Counsel and County Attorney Office to happen the week of August 12<sup>th</sup> on Dependent Status question. Gonzalez concern stems from the question “Who created our District?” Walsh understands from the Special District Office, Department of Commerce, that process could be as simple as an agreement between the District and Hillsborough County BOCC. However, recent conversation with Special Counsel begs the

question of Department of Ag role in relinquishing oversight of the district. Further, Dr Walsh said he had reached out to the 3 dependent active districts for information on how they made the switch from independent to dependent districts. Dr Walsh also pointed out the preponderance of evidence supporting a switch for HSWCD being a dependent district. HSWCD is supported by legal services, insurance, salaries, and our office building.

c. **OPPAGA Final Draft identified the following list of deficiencies in the management of this District.**

1. **Hiring practices:** evaluations are missing, vetting of potential employees and audit services.
2. **Public Records:** there is a need for a redundant system to keep records.
3. **Annual Public Notices:** HSWCD had failed to meet its Chapter 50 public notice requirements. 2024 legal notices are completed with Tampa Bay Times and In The Field magazine ads. ED Walsh recommended these yearly ads be placed in January beginning FY2024-25. The cost for these ads was less than \$1,000.00. Supervisor Morris and Supervisor Proctor suggested La Gaceta for publication of these yearly ads. ED Walsh was tasked to look into this publication.
4. **Budget, Controls and Meetings:** Dr. Walsh began by pointing out that there are 2 requirements that this board needs to meet towards budget controls. The first is that this board has not been convening annual budget approval meetings, which was called out by the OPPAGA report. The second requirement is that this board is supposed to submit a budget amendment every year to HCBOCC in February. Dr. Walsh suggested to the board that it should schedule a budget amendment meeting between August 2024 and February 2025 to identify its budget priorities to Dr. Walsh prior to the February submittal. The ideal timeframe for the budget control meeting is October 2024.
  - i. **Set budget meeting date:** no motion was made
  - ii. **South State Accounts:** ED Walsh recommended that the Hillsborough 100 and Mini Farms accounts be closed or frozen. Treasurer Morris is very concerned by Dr. Walsh's recommendations, with their being an unknown number of pending outstanding checks. This conversation led to direction to Dr. Walsh to solicit a letter of satisfaction from FDACS.
5. **Strategic Plan, Annual Work Plan, Performance Metrics:** the board agreed to meet in September 2024 to address Strategic Plan, Annual work Plan, and Performance Metrics.
6. **Annual Financial Reports and Audits:** Dr. Walsh discussed the July 29, 2024 letter from Auditor General, in the absence of Michael Wells (Hamilton & Associates, CPA). Chair Gill directed ED Walsh to contact Michael Wells of Hamilton & Associates concerning the board's response to the OPPAGA review and updates for the audits.

**Item 12: FY2024-25 BOCC's Recommended Budget:** ED Walsh reviewed the budget amendment covering this board's salary and operating expenses that are included in the HCBOCC's current recommended budget package. Treasurer Morris asked for clarification about the travel sub account and Supervisor Proctor asked clarification questions about certain salary sub-accounts. The current status is that although the total dollar values under the operating and salary accounts are now fixed, small changes can be made to the budget line-item amounts throughout the year. The HCBOCC will meet to finalize and adopt the FY2024-25 Budget on September 19<sup>th</sup>.

**Item 13: Upcoming Events and Other Notices:**

1. **NACD membership:** ED Walsh promoted continuing membership in NACD with note to the following benefits: their promotion of grant programs, training webinars, brand recognition of the

Envirothon program. Otherwise, Dr Walsh conceded that despite this board's experience and opinion of the AFCD, continued membership in this organization was worth the money due to the dollar value of the webpage support with Streamline.

2. **HSWCD homepage updates:** Dr Walsh encouraged the board to review and promote the homepage. He specifically pointed out the amount of effort that Ms. Eckdahl had put in to manage the content and redesign the webpage for easier customer use.
3. **Office improvements/pending work orders:** ED Walsh reported that several work orders were in process with Hillsborough County to improve safety and functionality of the new office. Key items include: overhead hazards in high traffic areas and the addition of the Surface Hub to support teleconferencing.
4. **Networking Events:** ED Walsh has been trying to work out the district's participation in 2024 Hillsborough County Fair and identified staffing a booth as a problem. He presented Ag Expo as an achievable alternative event given that this is a single day event during the same timeframe. The Ag Expo has the added advantage that the audience is primarily agriculture and agriculture service vendors. Supervisor Morris moved that HSWCD do not participate in the Hillsborough Co Fair and do participate in the Ag Expo. Supervisor McCullough seconded. Motion carried 4-0.

**Items 13A-13D: Non-Agenda Items:**

- a. **AFCD Quarterly Board Meeting Report:** Supervisor Morris discussed the August 2, 2024 meeting of the AFCD board which he attended. He shared that the FCDEA presented a letter very critical of the Executive Director of AFCD, Charleen Meeks. He also shared that Ms. Meeks had responded with a rebuttal letter.
- b. **HCBOCC Lease Agreement:** ED Walsh presented the County's draft lease agreement for the 4503 Coronet Rd facility to the board. Chair Gill was tasked to speak to Special Counsel Tom Gonzalez about any liabilities that the board will need to assume and pay for.
- c. **Auditor General's Letter:** see page #3, item# 11 c 6
- d. **Reconciliation of the MiniFarms Account:** see page#2, item#10
- e. **Resignation of Supervisor Young:** the board received notice of Supervisor Young's resignation at 12 Noon, August 8, 2024 via email. ED Walsh briefly reviewed the qualifications to be a candidate for Soil and Water Board: must own or lease land actively engaged in agriculture; actively engaged in a for profit agriculture operation; or have 10 years' experience in agriculture prior to retirement. Supervisor Morris moved that ED Walsh speak to Special Counsel Tom Gonzalez about the process for a Supervisor to resign, and how to fill the vacancy. Supervisor McCullough seconded. Motion carried 4-0.

**Item 14: Next Board Meeting:** Sept 12, 2024 @ 2PM Location: HSWCD Office 4503 Coronet Rd, Plant City, FL.

**Item 15: Adjournment:** Chair Gill adjourned the meeting 4:20 PM.