

**MINUTES OF THE
SOUTHWEST FLORIDA REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL
APRIL 17, 2025, MEETING**

The in-person and virtual zoom meeting of the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council's Executive Board was held on April 17, 2025. The meeting started at approximately 10:02am. A quorum of the Executive Committee was present.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Charlotte County: Mr. Don McCormick (zoom)
Collier County: Commissioner Bill McDaniel
Glades County: Commissioner, Tim Stanley
Hendry County: None
Lee County: Commissioner, David Mulicka (zoom)
Sarasota County: Councilman Ron Smith – City of Venice
Ex-Officio Members: None

OTHERS PRESENT

Ms. Margaret Wuerstle – SWFRPC, Executive Director
Ms. Rebekah Harp – SWFRPC, Deputy Director/Business Operations Manager
Ms. Catherine Peralta – SWFRPC Vista

Zoom Attendance

Ms. Asmaa Odeh – SWFRPC, LEPC Coordinator/VISTA Supervisor
Mr. Jim Burch – SWFRPC, Disaster Recovery Coordinator/Project Manager
Ms. Alysia Cancel – SWFRPC Vista
Ms. Kristin Dozier – FRCA Executive Director
Jennifer Codo-Salisbury – CFRPC Executive Director
Lacey Lingelbach – Florida Flood Hub

AGENDA

AGENDA ITEM #6(a)(b)(c) - MINUTES MINUTES OF THE MARCH 20, 2025 COUNCIL/EXECUTIVE MEETING

Councilman Ron Smith offered a motion to accept the March 20, 2025, Council/Executive Meeting Minutes. Commissioner Tim Stanley seconded the motion to accept the March 20, 2025, Council/Executive Meeting Minutes. The motion was approved unanimously.

AGENDA ITEM #7(a)(b) - FINANCIALS FEBRUARY FINANCIALS MARCH FINANCIALS

Ms. Wuerstle explained that the current situation is typical, noting that they follow a predictable cycle. She indicated that June should be a strong month financially due to several large reimbursements expected. She also mentioned that they are currently working on a grant from which no funds can be collected until the entire grant is completed. This is expected to be finalized by June 30th, which should allow them to close out the fiscal year in a solid financial position. While a large surplus is not anticipated, the year is still expected to end on a positive note.

Ms. Wuerstle continued by noting that she had one additional item to discuss regarding the financials, which she intended to share after the current reports were adopted. However, she went on to inform the group that the auditors are scheduled to present the audit at next month's meeting, and that Rebekah has been working closely with them. Rebekah has also prepared the draft budget for the upcoming year. If Collier County pays its dues at the rate of 15 cents, the budget would show a deficit of approximately \$62,000. This deficit, however, would be covered by reserves, and Ms. Wuerstle added that securing grants to cover that amount is feasible. As a result, the financial outlook for the 2025–2026 fiscal year appears stable at this point.

Commissioner McDaniel requested that a detailed financial report be prepared for the next month's meeting outlining the organization's financial "burn rate" — the rate at which funds are being expended in relation to known income and expenses. He emphasized that this is a metric he has discussed with staff over the past several years, specifically focusing on the relationship between available reserves and ongoing financial obligations.

He expressed concern over shifting financial projections, referencing past statements that the organization might not remain solvent past certain dates, which have since been revised multiple times. McDaniel noted that due to issues with the Clerk of Courts, Collier County is currently unable to release funding to the organization, as the necessary documents — including the draft bylaws, memorandum of understanding (MOU), and interlocal agreement — must be officially adopted by the organization to qualify as a public expense. Although Collier County has now adopted these documents, the payment issue remains unresolved.

In response to a clarifying question from Councilman Ron Smith, McDaniel confirmed that the requested burn rate report should assume no payments from Collier County or any other municipalities. He expressed concern that other local governments may also withhold payments due to legal or procedural complications related to the draft documents.

McDaniel concluded by stating that he wants a clear and specific analysis next month showing the current available reserves, anticipated income, and the projected timeline for when funds will be exhausted based on current and expected expenditures.

Ms. Wuerstle responded by directing attention to page 23 of the meeting packet, which outlines the details of the organization's reserves. She clarified that the true reserves are represented by the investment funds, which total \$121,676. The larger total shown includes cash and cash equivalents that are used for operating expenses. She further noted that the reserve amount fluctuates slightly, pointing to page 30 of the packet, where the figure is shown as approximately \$122,000.

Commissioner McDaniel commented that a small amount would not significantly impact the organization's financial position. Ms. Wuerstle acknowledged this but sought clarification on the level of detail McDaniel was requesting in the financial report.

Commissioner McDaniel explained that he is looking for more than what was currently provided. Specifically, he requested a detailed monthly chart showing actual operating income, estimated income, projected expenses, and the amount being drawn from reserves to cover any deficits. He continued that this chart should be based solely on known revenue and expenses, excluding any assumptions about future grant awards or potential contributions from municipalities.

Commissioner McDaniel referenced previous overly optimistic projections, he stated earlier forecasts that had suggested the organization would run out of funds before September — projections that did not happen.

Ms. Wuerstle responded that the improved outlook was due to the receipt of grants, but McDaniel responded that the issue stemmed from inaccurate initial estimations. He reiterated that the report he is requesting should not rely on speculative income, such as possible grants or payments from other entities, but instead focus only on confirmed financial data. Additionally, he asked for a clear explanation of how much of the reserves are expendable and currently being used to cover operational shortfalls. His goal is to determine, with as much certainty as possible, when the organization's reserves will be depleted based on current and expected obligations.

Commissioner McDaniel asked if participants online had any questions.

David Mulicka stated that he was listening and expressed his support for the questions being asked, noting that they seemed reasonable to him. He added that if he needed to formally

express his support for the motion, he was willing to do so and asked for guidance on how to proceed via Zoom.

Councilman Ron Smith offered a motion to accept the February and March Financials. Commissioner Tim Stanley seconded the motion to accept the December and January Financials. The motion was approved unanimously.

Commissioner McDaniel made a motion requesting a detailed report to be presented at the next meeting. The report should include known revenues, known expenses, and the projected reduction of total reserves until those reserves are fully depleted. He emphasized the need for this information in order to develop a plan for the organization's future sustainability, especially given the fluctuating nature of incoming revenue. He noted that while Margaret mentioned additional grant money expected in June—which includes administrative fees—those funds cannot be reliably accounted for until they are actually received, as timing depends on the grantors. He also referenced the unpredictability of sources such as DOGE.

Commissioner Bill McDaniel offered a motion for a detailed financial report. Councilman Ron Smith seconded the motion for a detailed financial report. The motion was approved unanimously.

David Mulicka asked about the government funds activity sheet, noting that the data ended on September 30, 2023, and questioned why it was a year and a half old.

Ms. Harp explained that the auditors provide the data annually and that a new graph showing 2024 figures would be available next month. She clarified that the information is based on the audit year/fiscal year.

Commissioner McDaniel commented that the annual data cannot be added until the auditor's report is received. Ms. Harp confirmed that it comes from the auditors' report.

AGENDA ITEM #7(c)
FINANCIALS:
DRAFT COMPARISON OF ASSESSMENTS (Current vs. Proposed) (*Informational*)

No discussion took place.

AGENDA ITEM #7(d)
FINANCIALS:
GOVERNMENT FUND HISTORY (*Informational*)

No discussion took place.

AGENDA ITEM #8

CONSENT AGENDA

None

AGENDA ITEM #9, #9(a) DIRECTORS REPORT BURNT STORE CORRIDOR COALITION

Ms. Wuerstle passed out to all the members her letter of resignation.

Commissioner McDaniel asked if Ms. Wuerstle would be able to prepare the report for next month's meeting. Ms. Wuerstle confirmed that she would be able to do so, explaining that her contract requires a 45-day notice and that her last day of employment will be June 3rd. She explained that she will be present at the next meeting to deliver the report. She apologized to those attending remotely and formally announced her resignation, effective immediately, with her final working day being June 3rd.

Commissioner McDaniel asked if Rebekah would be staying with the RPC which Ms. Harp confirmed that she would be staying with the RPC.

Ms. Wuerstle noted that she has been working closely with the Burnt Store Corridor Coalition group, which is interested in developing a master plan for the corridor. While they are considering a State Technical Assistance Grant, the funding available is not sufficient to cover a full master plan. As an alternative, due to the corridor's role as an evacuation route, the focus will shift toward assessing resiliency and vulnerability. She added that they are hopeful about securing another grant for this purpose, although the Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) has not yet been released.

Commissioner McDaniel asked about the first item on the directors report regarding the Legislative Update. He mentioned that Ms. Harp had sent him a resolution recommending opposition to two specific bills and asked if there were any updates on their status.

Ms. Wuerstle confirmed that she had an update but noted that Kristen Dozier, who was attending the meeting virtually and represents FRCA, has been closely monitoring the situation alongside Ron Book and Rana.

Ms. Kristin Dozier, Executive Director of FRCA, introduced herself and provided an update on Senate Bill 1264 and House Bill 1125. She thanked the Council for passing a resolution in opposition to the bills and noted that FRCA has been actively engaged in monitoring and responding to the legislation since the beginning of the session. She explained that SB 1264 had passed through the Commerce Committee and the Appropriations Committee on Transportation and Tourism, and is now scheduled for its final stop in the Rules Committee on Monday from 2:00 to 6:00 p.m.

Senator Collins, the bill sponsor, mentioned “compromise language” during the most recent committee hearing—language requested by Florida Commerce, as this is a department bill. FRCA, along with lobbyists Ron Book and Rana Brown, is closely engaged and hopeful that favorable amendments will be introduced before the Rules Committee meeting.

Commissioner McDaniel asked whether a draft of the compromise language had been shared, Ms. Dozier clarified that FRCA represents all ten regional planning councils in Florida, including Southwest Florida RPC, regardless of dues status. She emphasized that the proposed compromise language does not single out Southwest Florida, although the region has been indirectly referenced by the bill sponsor.

She further explained that FRCA's primary advocacy goal is to preserve Chapter 186, the statutory framework that authorizes regional planning councils. Planning councils are referenced in Florida statutes 85 times, and Chapter 186 is foundational. FRCA has requested that any references to this chapter be removed from the bill to protect the council’s statutory authority.

Commissioner McDaniel would like to be kept informed about any draft compromise language related to the proposed legislation. He requested that Margaret ensure that Ms. Dozier has his contact information, encouraging her to call or text him directly. He expressed interest in reviewing the draft language so that he could assess its impact and potentially advocate for it with his legislative contacts, particularly if it benefits the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council.

Ms. Dozier welcomed the opportunity to connect with Commissioner McDaniel and confirmed that she would obtain his contact information through Margaret or Rebekah. She acknowledged that some aspects of the ongoing negotiations are being discussed privately among the planning council directors via Zoom to avoid entering sensitive matters into the public record. She also mentioned that she is preparing a list of Senators along with the planning council regions they represent, which will be distributed shortly and could aid targeted outreach efforts.

Ms. Dozier encouraged direct communication between local officials and legislators, particularly emphasizing the value of sharing specific examples of how the regional planning council has benefited the area. She noted that personal, project-specific advocacy is far more impactful than general support statements.

Ms. Dozier shared that she previously served as a Leon County Commissioner in Tallahassee for 12 years and served on the Apalachee Regional planning council and the FRCA board for several years. She expressed understanding of Commissioner McDaniel's regional focus and reiterated that his input would be valuable during this transition period for the Southwest Florida RPC.

Councilman Smith thanked Ms. Dozier for attending and asked whether there were any updates on the anticipated Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) related to the federal disaster

supplemental funding for storm resiliency. He noted that many municipalities had participated in a productive meeting following the funding's passage and were eager for updates.

Ms. Dozier responded that, based on recent conversations with the statewide Economic Development Administration (EDA) representative, the NOFA is still expected to be released within the next few months, potentially by July. She explained that the process typically involves recovery workshops followed by a two- to three-month waiting period. While a firm release date is unknown, she indicated preparations are already underway for coordination among all ten regional planning councils, with eight of them expected to be eligible for this funding.

She also shared insights from a recent national meeting hosted by the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO), which focused on broader federal funding issues and the evolving grant language requirements—particularly related to economically disadvantaged communities. Additionally, NADO is developing a resource page to track funding updates from EDA and other federal agencies.

Ms. Dozier assured Councilman Smith that FRCA would keep local directors, including Rebekah and Margaret, informed of any developments and offered to remain in direct contact with the Chair on this issue.

Councilman Smith expressed appreciation for the thorough update and looked forward to the remainder of Ms. Dozier's legislative report.

Kristin Dozier provided an update on the legislative progress of the bills affecting regional planning councils. On the Senate side, she confirmed that the bill had reached its third and final committee stop, scheduled for Monday, with hopes of securing additional speakers from Central Florida and East Central Regional planning council and others, to supplement prior support from North Florida.

On the House side, she noted the bill had not yet been heard in any committee. Its first stop would be the House Commerce Committee, which had its final scheduled meeting set for Tuesday, the 22nd. However, the agenda would likely be published by Friday the 18th, or at the latest by Monday the 21st—leaving a tight window to organize speakers if the bill is included.

Ms. Dozier pointed out that if the bill is not heard in the House, it creates an unusual situation: progress in the Senate without movement in the House, which could impact end-of-session negotiations. She explained this type of bill has surfaced multiple times in the past 15 years, and while optimism remains, the outcome is far from certain.

Commissioner McDaniel reiterated the challenges of a bill passing without being heard in both chambers and stated that the possibility of the bill resurfacing via amendment or attachment to another bill always exists. He thanked Ms. Dozier and noted that his staff in Collier County are actively tracking the bill's progress.

Ms. Dozier concluded the discussion by reaffirming FRCA's support for the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council during its transition. Ms. Dozier expressed her commitment to ongoing collaboration and assistance, while Commissioner McDaniel welcomed the opportunity to work more closely together in the future.

AGENDA ITEM #9(b)
GRANT ACTIVITY SHEET (*Informational*)

No discussion took place.

AGENDA ITEM #10
COMMITTEE REPORTS

AGENDA ITEM #10(a)
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

There was no update given as the Executive Committee has been meeting during the regular Council Meetings.

AGENDA ITEM #11
NEW BUSINESS

No new business was discussed.

AGENDA ITEM #12
STATE AGENCIES COMMENTS/REPORTS

No State Agency's reports given.

AGENDA ITEM #13
COUNCIL MEMBERS' COMMENTS

David Mulicka stated that this is his first meeting and is sorry to hear the mention of the Executive Director's resignation. He asked why or was this a preplanned event, or what the succession plan is and how do we respond going forward.

Commissioner McDaniel responded that the resignation was unexpected and new to everyone present. He affirmed that Margaret had the right to resign at any time and noted that Rebekah would remain on board to provide support.

Commissioner McDaniel proposed holding an organizational meeting next month, likely at the Department of Transportation, to address the Council's path forward—particularly in relation to financial sustainability, citing the need to understand the “burn rate.”

Commissioner McDaniel also discussed his ongoing efforts to engage member counties, with regards to the draft MOU, interlocal agreement, and bylaws. He explained his intention to formally present these drafts to the Lee County Board of Commissioners during a scheduled agenda item, rather than under public comment. He noted that Collier County had already adopted the drafts, though payment issues arose due to legal concerns from their Clerk of Courts. Commissioner McDaniel requested that Commissioner Mulicka speak with his senior staff about these drafts and help facilitate a formal invitation for him to address the Lee County Commission.

Commissioner Mulicka agreed and asked that any materials or requests be sent to his official District 3 email at dist3@leegov.com. He also acknowledged that the RPC membership listing still showed Chair Ruane and Commissioner Hammond as Lee County's representatives and requested an update to reflect his new role. He committed to working with McDaniel offline to support the initiative and help reengage Lee County with the RPC.

Ms. Wuerstle offered to send the draft documents to Commissioner Mulicka and confirmed that she had his email address on file.

Commissioner Mulicka expressed his willingness to be a team player, asking for guidance as he transitions into his new role on the Council.

Mr. McCormick shared that he had been present at Ms. Wuerstle's first meeting with the organization and expressed his appreciation for her professionalism and leadership, particularly highlighting the successful sale of the Council's building in Fort Myers. He publicly thanked her for her service and noted it was a pleasure working with her.

Commissioner McDaniel began by asking Commissioner Stanley whether Glades and Hendry Counties hold joint or independent board meetings; Commissioner Stanley clarified that they meet independently. Commissioner McDaniel then asked if Commissioner Stanley had received draft versions of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), Interlocal Agreement (ILA), and Bylaws, to which Stanley replied that he didn't recall receiving them but confirmed he serves as Chairman. Commissioner McDaniel indicated his intent to follow up offline with Stanley to review those drafts and to schedule time to present them to Commissioner Stanley's board in the coming months.

Commissioner Stanley expressed regret over the council's current situation, referencing his 12 years of service and the council's long-standing history. He shared that he had spoken with Jennifer Codo-Salisbury, Executive Director of the Central Florida Regional Planning Council, who had offered her organization's support in helping the Southwest Florida RPC recover or restructure if needed.

Councilman Smith asked Commissioner Stanley who was willing to assist. Which Commissioner Stanley responded that it was Jennifer Salisbury at the Central Florida RPC who had offered assistance.

Commissioner McDaniel acknowledged her prior involvement during a past RPC meeting where FRCA attended and asked Commissioner Stanley to help coordinate any future collaboration. Commissioner McDaniel also cautioned that pending state legislation could result in the dissolution or consolidation of RPCs, including their own. If that occurred, existing member counties might be required to join neighboring RPCs, such as Central Florida or Tampa Bay, to remain compliant with statutory requirements. He stated the need to monitor the outcome of the legislative session before determining next steps.

Commissioner Stanley expressed appreciation for the behind-the-scenes support being offered and acknowledged that such assistance would be valuable.

Ms. Harp then noted that Jennifer Codo-Salisbury, Executive Director of the Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC), was present on the call and had confirmed via chat that the CFRPC is available to offer support.

Commissioner McDaniel requested that Ms. Salisbury's contact information be shared with him, as he may need to coordinate with her depending on how events unfold.

Councilman Smith, expressed concern about the short timeline left before Executive Director Ms. Wuerstle's resignation becomes effective. Councilman Smith thanked Ms. Wuerstle for her service and asked whether she might consider staying on for an additional 30–45 days to help with the transition.

Ms. Wuerstle explained that her resignation was driven by urgent family matters, particularly the serious illness of her sister, but said she had already committed to remaining through June 3rd. She added that if circumstances allowed, she would consider staying longer.

Councilman Smith acknowledged the importance of family and said they could revisit the matter at the next meeting. He also expressed concern about having limited time afterward—roughly 15 days—to coordinate with another planning council or advertise the Executive Director position.

Commissioner McDaniel responded that they should revisit those concerns during the next meeting. He noted that Rebekah will be available to provide support during the transition and reassured everyone that if Ms. Wuerstle needed to leave early, her family should come first. He further stated that Collier County's staff would assist with administrative functions such as accounting and grant compliance to ensure the continued legal and operational integrity of the organization.

Councilman Smith pointed out that, according to the March meeting minutes, if the organization dissolves, Collier County has committed to managing the remaining funds and grants. Emphasizing that they are in crisis mode.

Commissioner Stanley added that in his experience, when key personnel like county managers leave suddenly, it creates issues with basic operations such as signing checks. He stressed the importance of ensuring that the Executive Director formally transfers financial authority to someone else before her departure.

Ms. Harp explained that while all financial transactions are now processed online, the bank still requires designated check signers. She is in the process of transitioning those responsibilities from Don to the new chair and is preparing the necessary documentation.

Commissioner Stanley noted that although he had the authority to sign checks, he did not have the authority to approve bills, which was a road block for them during their time of transition.

Councilman Smith suggested that these issues should be reviewed with the organization's auditor.

Ms. Harp agreed and emphasized the importance of internal controls and separation of duties. She noted that while she can prepare financial documents, someone else must approve them—currently, that Ms. Wuerstle approves everything.

Ms. Wuerstle reminded the board that they have a talented staff—including Rebekah, Asmaa, Catherine, Jim Burch, Alicia, and Julie Banks—who are familiar with program details and can support the organization through the transition. She stressed the importance of resolving the technical aspects of signing and approving financial transactions.

Commissioner McDaniel asked if there were any further questions.

Councilman Smith expressed appreciation for the discussion.

Commissioner McDaniel then reflected on his eight years of service, commending Ms. Wuerstle for her efforts in leading the organization through significant changes, especially after the dissolution of the former Department of Community Affairs. He acknowledged her contributions and wished her and her family well. He added that she would continue to assist during the transition and that the board would soon need to address questions of legality and compliance, especially with auditors expected next month.

Ms. Wuerstle reaffirmed her willingness to assist the organization beyond her resignation, offering her personal contact information and expressing a commitment to support the transition in any way she can.

**AGENDA ITEM #14
ADJOURN**

The meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

Commissioner Bill McDaniel, Chair

The meeting was duly advertised in the April 9, 2025, issue of the FLORIDA ADMINISTRATIVE REGISTER, Volume 51, Number 69.