

**MINUTES OF THE
SOUTHWEST FLORIDA REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL
MARCH 20, 2025, MEETING**

The in-person and virtual zoom meeting of the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council's Executive Board was held on March 20, 2025. The meeting started at approximately 10:03 am. A quorum of the Executive Committee was present.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Charlotte County: Mr. Don McCormick (zoom)

Collier County: Commissioner Bill McDaniel,
Councilman Bill Kramer (zoom)

Glades County: None

Hendry County: None

Lee County: None

Sarasota County: Councilman Ron Smith – City of Venice

Ex-Officio Members: Mr. Phil Flood, SFWMD (zoom)
Mr. Wayne Gaither, FDOT

OTHERS PRESENT

Ms. Margaret Wuerstle – SWFRPC, Executive Director
Ms. Catherine Peralta – SWFRPC Vista

Zoom Attendance

Mr. Derek Felder – President of the Unite Lehigh, Inc.
Mr. Stephen Downes, PE, LEED AP - GRAEF
Mr. Jim Burch – SWFRPC, Disaster Recovery Coordinator/Project Manager
Ms. Alysia Cancel – SWFRPC Vista

AGENDA

AGENDA ITEM #6(a)(b)(c) - MINUTES

MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 19, 2024 COUNCIL/EXECUTIVE MEETING

MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 16, 2025 COUNCIL/EXECUTIVE MEETING

MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 20, 2025 COUNCIL/EXECUTIVE MEETING

Councilman Ron Smith offered a motion to accept the December, January and February Council/Executive Meeting Minutes. Commissioner Bill McDaniel seconded the motion to accept the December, January and February Council/Executive Meeting Minutes. The motion was approved unanimously.

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

DECEMBER FINANCIALS

JANUARY FINANCIALS

Ms. Wuerstle explained that during the previous meeting the December financials were reviewed, highlighting a surplus of \$984 at the month-end. Additionally noting that January's financials also reported a positive net income of \$81 dollars, which is typical for the monthly billing cycle and was happy that the SWFRPC remains in the black.

Commissioner McDaniel asked Ms. Wuerstle to provide a brief explanation of payments received, revenue and burn rate for the SWFRPC.

Ms. Wuerstle stated that we are exactly where we expected to be financially. She mentioned that Glades is currently the only county paying dues, while the City of Naples is also contributing. However, no payments have been received from Collier County yet, though communication with them is ongoing. Regarding grants, she explained that a few have been successfully closed out, while work continues on others. She added that it's challenging to predict future funding due to the current situation at the federal level, but noted that the federal government has generally been reliable when it comes to reimbursements.

Commissioner McDaniel responded that at a 10,000-foot view we still have operating revenues through September of this coming year?

Ms. Wuerstle responded yes.

Commissioner McDaniel provided context regarding the situation with the Collier County dues, explaining that there was a conflict involving his senior staff—though he was unsure of the specific nature of the issue. He clarified that while Collier County approved the By-Laws and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which included a \$0.15 per capita payment, the SWFRPC bill was issued at the \$0.30 per capita rate since the board has not yet formally adopted the draft By-Laws and MOU. This discrepancy created confusion when the invoice was received by Collier County.

To address the issue, Commissioner McDaniel is preparing an executive summary to present to the Collier County Board next Tuesday, aiming to clarify the disconnect between internal processes and move the payment forward. He emphasized that Collier County will not continue to provide funding solely to support staff. Furthermore, if efforts to bring other counties back into the RPC are unsuccessful, Collier County will cease its payments altogether. He noted this matter has persisted for over eight years and reiterated that there is no statutory obligation for the county to provide financial support—only to participate as a member of the RPC. According to the structure, only counties are required to be members, each represented by two commissioners.

Commissioner McDaniel also acknowledged that he is behind schedule on his goal to reach out to all RPC members by the end of the month, admitting that it will not happen. While he is continuing to make progress, it has been slower than anticipated.

He went on to say that the RPC will be receiving funds from both Collier County and the City of Naples, and that internal accounting will be done to reflect credits for the municipalities within the contributing counties going forward. He reaffirmed his commitment to continuing outreach efforts with his fellow commissioners in hopes of bringing them back into the fold. He mentioned that he had a meeting scheduled with Michael in Hendry County earlier this week, but it was postponed due to an outage in his IT department. While he is maintaining communication with his colleagues, he acknowledged that it's not progressing as quickly as he had hoped.

Ms. Wuerstle acknowledged that Collier County does not want to pay dues solely to support staff. However, she emphasized that the county simply needs to communicate what projects they would like the RPC to undertake. Whether it's writing or administering grants, or working on other initiatives, the RPC is ready and willing to carry out whatever projects Collier County requests in return for the funding they provide.

Commissioner McDaniel responded by emphasizing that the core issue is the relevancy of the RPC. He stated that Collier County doesn't need the RPC. The community needs the RPC and the need for regionality in discussions. Commissioner McDaniel reiterated that Collier County doesn't need the RPC to write grants for them. Hendry and Glades County does because they don't have the economic basis that Collier County does. He expressed that he is appreciative of Ms. Wuerstle comments but clarified that his purpose within the organization is to support its relevance and promote regional communication. However, if he is unsuccessful in bringing the other counties back into active participation, he will not support Collier County continuing to fund the RPC solely to maintain staff - because he feels that is basically what is happening right now.

Ms. Wuerstle replied that, in that case, the RPC will not provide training for Collier County's first responders. She clarified that the funding being provided is what enables the RPC to offer those training services and emphasized that it's unfair to claim the organization isn't doing anything, as those funds directly support the work being done, including essential training programs.

Commissioner McDaniel responded by saying that he wanted to share the potential consequences if all counties do not participate and contribute their fair share. He explained

that he and Collier County supported the organization during his first three years, consistently paying the requested per diem in support of the Promise Zone initiative—originally established under the Obama administration to support rural areas.

Even when other counties, such as Sarasota, Charlotte, and Hendry, withdrew their support, Collier County continued to contribute. He emphasized that he remains a strong advocate for the RPC and the broader goals of regional cooperation and communication. However, he noted that the future of the RPC is uncertain, and upcoming items on the agenda will further highlight those challenges.

Ms. Wuerstle noted that the organization might need to delay legislative action depending on upcoming developments. She explained that the interlocal agreement and bylaws were recently revised to align with current statutes but acknowledged that changes in legislation may require further updates.

Commissioner McDaniel agreed, that statutes are frequently updated. He stated that the current bylaws and MOU were revised based on the existing legal framework, and if legislation changes, the organization will adapt accordingly. He hopes that progress can be made in the next few months but warned that if he is not successful in securing broader county participation, he can no longer recommend Collier County taxpayer support for the organization.

Ms. Wuerstle responded that the organization must be prepared to revise its bylaws again if needed.

Councilman Smith sought clarification, asking if Collier County was currently contributing and whether future support was contingent on other counties participating.

Commissioner McDaniel confirmed this, stating that Collier County has led by example by continuing to contribute even when other counties withdrew years ago. The recent restructuring to quarterly payments was meant to improve transparency and accountability to taxpayers.

Ms. Wuerstle added that the organization remains financially on track through the end of the fiscal year because the budget was based solely on secured funds, not projections. Continued federal reimbursements will sustain operations, and any additional funding from Collier County or new grants will further improve financial stability.

Commissioner McDaniel stated that if the organization dissolves due to lack of funds or staff, Collier County has committed to managing the remaining funds and grants. His senior staff is prepared to step in and ensure proper administration and disbursement of any outstanding resources, should federal funding stop.

Councilman Ron Smith offered a motion to accept the December and January Financials. Commissioner Bill McDaniel seconded the motion to accept the December and January Financials. The motion was approved unanimously.

AGENDA ITEM #7(c)

FINANCIALS:

DRAFT COMPARISON OF ASSESSMENTS (Current vs. Proposed) (*Informational*)

AGENDA ITEM #7(d)

FINANCIALS:

GOVERNMENT FUND HISTORY (*Informational*)

AGENDA ITEM #8

CONSENT AGENDA

None

AGENDA ITEM #9

DIRECTORS REPORT

AGENDA ITEM #9(a)

UPDATE ON FEBRUARY 19 LISTENING SESSION

Ms. Wuerstle reported that last month's listening session was, in her view, a success. Approximately 40 participants joined online, with 25 to 30 attending in person. As a result of the session, 39 project summaries were submitted for potential supplemental funding related to Hurricanes Helene and Milton. Although the submission period has now closed, the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) has yet been released. Staff is monitoring its status daily. A video recording and meeting notes are available for anyone interested in reviewing the session.

AGENDA ITEM #9(b)

US 27 RAIL CORRIDOR MAP AND PRESENTATION

Ms. Wuerstle reminded the council that a motion regarding the U.S. Rail Corridor was adopted at a previous meeting. Following that, a request was made to provide the related map and presentation, which Tom Lanahan subsequently submitted. She noted that no further action is required and that the materials are for informational purposes only.

Councilman Smith mentioned the presentation was already reviewed last month. Ms. Wuerstle confirmed this and reiterated that no vote was necessary. Commissioner McDaniel asked if there would be a presentation at the current meeting, to which Ms. Wuerstle responded that Tom Lanahan had presented it at the prior meeting—clarifying that McDaniel may have missed it due to being in Tallahassee at the time.

AGENDA ITEM #9(c)(d)

SB1264 & HB1125 MEMO, FRCA FACT SHEET, RESOLUTION

SB1264 & HB1125 COMPARISON

Ms. Wuerstle introduced a memo and resolution included in the meeting packet addressing pending state legislation—Senate Bill 1264 and House Bill 1125. These bills, among other provisions, propose removing regional planning councils (RPCs) from state statutes. The resolution urges legislators to exclude RPCs from the proposed legislation to prevent their elimination. A fact sheet outlining the role and value of RPCs, along with a comparison of the two bills, was also included in the materials.

She informed the council that prior to the meeting, there was a call involving FRCA and lobbyist Ron Book. While the bills have not yet been heard, the legislative process is behind schedule, with plans to form subcommittees to address multiple bills. The process remains uncertain, with legislative rules in flux.

Commissioner McDaniel noted the disorganized nature of this year's legislative session, with unusual special sessions and deadline extensions. He asked whether the resolution required adoption at the current meeting, to which Ms. Wuerstle confirmed yes.

Commissioner McDaniel supported the resolution, emphasizing its simplicity. It solely requests the removal of RPCs from the bills without delving into details about their past work. He explained that the resolution serves as a unified message from all RPCs in the state to present to legislators.

Councilman Smith asked if every regional planning council was taking the same approach. Ms. Wuerstle confirmed that they were.

Councilman Ron Smith offered a motion to adopt the Resolution 25-02. Commissioner Bill McDaniel seconded the motion to adopt the Resolution 25-02. The motion was approved unanimously.

Ms. Wuerstle informed the council that a revised version of the fact sheet—originally attached to the resolution—no longer includes the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council. She explained that this removal was made at the request of lobbyist Ron Book, who cited vague "chatter" within the Legislature regarding SWFRPC. The intent was to avoid drawing further attention that could potentially harm the council's standing.

Commissioner McDaniel asked whether the fact sheet was officially part of the resolution. Ms. Wuerstle confirmed that while it was included in the packet, it is not directly referenced in the resolution. Commissioner McDaniel stated that as long as the resolution itself remains unchanged, FRCA can adjust the fact sheet as they see fit.

Ms. Wuerstle then voiced her concern that this is not the first attempt to remove regional planning councils from state law. She referenced a previous instance where the Withlacoochee Regional Planning Council was dissolved while others remained. She expressed concern that SWFRPC could be the next targeted for elimination.

Councilman Smith questioned whether the "chatter" might suggest a potential merger of SWFRPC with other regional councils, such as Tampa or Miami. Ms. Wuerstle said she couldn't confirm that, as no specific details were provided.

Commissioner McDaniel offered insight into the nature of the "chatter," stating it likely stems from ongoing debate about the value and effectiveness of the SWFRPC, especially given the funding it has received over the years. He noted significant dissatisfaction from neighboring counties, including Lee, Charlotte, and Sarasota, which poses a political challenge. However, he reiterated that the resolution passed by the council simply asks for the removal of RPCs from the proposed bills, and he committed to engaging with Collier County's lobbyists to gather more detailed information.

He concluded by noting that while the bills have not yet been heard in committee, the legislative process often accelerates in the final two weeks of session. He promised to provide an update at the next meeting, once more is known about the outcome of the legislation and any associated discussions.

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

Ms. Wuerstle informed the council that she has requested the grant tracking sheet be included in all future meeting packets. This document outlines both historical and recent grant applications, regardless of their approval status, to keep members fully informed.

She then provided an update on a newly awarded resiliency grant from the Florida DEP. The grant involves collaboration among the coastal counties of Charlotte, Collier, Lee, and Sarasota. A kickoff meeting was held the previous week, with over 20 participants in attendance and was a very successful meeting. The project's main goal is to assess existing vulnerability studies and resiliency plans, identify completed work, and determine where gaps remain. Staff members Catherine, Alicia, and Jim were commended for their outstanding job. A recording of the meeting is available for anyone interested.

Ms. Wuerstle stressed that the primary issue raised was not the lack of resiliency plans, but the need for funding to implement those plans—an area that the council will now focus on addressing.

Commissioner McDaniel emphasized the importance of including inland waterway dredging in regional resiliency planning efforts. While he acknowledged that funding is a common concern, he cautioned against focusing solely on coastal resiliency—specifically beach restoration—at the expense of addressing inland flooding issues.

He noted that coastal communities often prioritize beach projects, such as building higher and wider shorelines, without sufficient attention to inland waterways. McDaniel argued that

during significant storm events like Hurricanes Ian, Milton, and Irma, tidal surges and heavy rainfall have overwhelmed inland areas due to insufficient waterway capacity.

He explained that resilient beach infrastructure can unintentionally redirect storm surge inland, causing widespread flooding when the excess water has nowhere else to go. This is compounded by sediment buildup—natural or manmade—that limits the volume and flow capacity of rivers, canals, and lakes.

Drawing on his experience with the 16-County Coalition for Lake Okeechobee, McDaniel highlighted that the lake's capacity is reduced by "legacy sediment" at the bottom, not just water levels. Removing sediment could restore needed volume, he said.

He urged staff and planners to ensure that inland volume creation, such as dredging, is integrated into all resiliency plans and funding strategies. Without it, communities will continue to face flooding both from coastal surges and inland rainfall, as demonstrated by past hurricanes that affected both coastal and inland regions alike.

Ms. Wuerstle provided a final grant-related update that is not yet reflected on the grant tracking sheet. She reported receiving a request from Charlotte County regarding the Burnt Store Road Coalition, which includes strong collaboration and support from Charlotte County, Lee County, Punta Gorda, and Cape Coral. The coalition aims to develop a comprehensive master plan for the Burnt Store Road corridor and is seeking assistance from the Regional Planning Council to write the necessary grants.

Ms. Wuerstle noted that she is currently reviewing approximately 15 documents outlining the coalition's goals and plans. While they intend to apply for a \$75,000 State Technical Planning Grant, she emphasized that the amount is insufficient to fund a full master plan. As a result, the Council is also exploring additional funding sources to support the project more effectively. She concluded by stating that this request, along with ongoing grant efforts, represents the Council's current workload.

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**

Mr. McCormick mentioned that he met with Mr. John Fleming, the head of the Burnt Store Coalition, and his associate, stating that they are dedicated and serious about completing the Master Plan.

Councilman Kramer expressed his thoughts on the current situation, acknowledging that while Naples is not a required member, they aim to be good neighbors. He reflected on being initially assigned to the RPC, which was described as irrelevant and potentially defunct, but he disagreed with that assessment and believes the RPC still holds value. Councilman Kramer emphasized the importance of resiliency, both inland and along the coast, as a central focus for everyone involved. He made it clear that his team is willing to support the efforts, but they are committed to making a positive impact, not wasting time. He stated that if the RPC has a clear, logical path toward meaningful results, they are fully on board; otherwise, they do not want to spend time without progress.

Mr. Flood commented on the RPC bills, noting that by the end of the day, it would become clearer how significant these bills are and whether they will progress. Both bills have four committee stops, and with the session being in its third week out of nine, the agendas for the first committee stops will be announced later that day. If the bills are not included on the agenda, it would indicate that they are not a high priority for either the Senate President or the Speaker of the House.

**AGENDA ITEM #14
ADJOURN**

The meeting ended at 10:45 a.m.



Commissioner Bill McDaniel, Chair

The meeting was duly advertised in the March 11, 2025, issue of the FLORIDA ADMINISTRATIVE REGISTER, Volume 51, Number 49.