

**MINUTES OF THE
SOUTHWEST FLORIDA REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL
September 19, 2024, MEETING**

The virtual zoom meeting of the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council's Executive Board was held on September 19, 2024. Collier County Commissioner and Council Chair, Mr. Bill McDaniel called the meeting to order at 9:16 a.m. There was a quorum of the Executive Committee present.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Charlotte County: Mr. Don McCormick (zoom)

Collier County: Commissioner Bill McDaniel
Councilman Bill Kramer - City of Naples (zoom)

Glades County: None

Hendry County: None

Lee County: Councilman Fred Burson – City of Fort Myers

Sarasota County: Councilman Ron Smith – City of Venice

Ex-Officio Members: Mr. Phil Flood, SFWMD

OTHERS PRESENT

Ms. Margaret Wuerstle - Executive Director, SWFRPC
Ms. Rebekah Harp – SWFRPC
Ms. Catherine Peralta – SWFRPC Vista
Ms. Sofia Mercer – SWFRPC Vista
Ms. Alyssia Cancel – SWFRPC Vista

AGENDA #5

Councilman Fred Burson offered a motion to approve the agenda. Commissioner Bill McDaniel seconded the motion to approve the agenda. The motion was approved unanimously.

AGENDA ITEM #6(a)

MINUTES OF THE JULY 18, 2024, COUNCIL/EXECUTIVE MEETING

Councilman Fred Burson offered a motion to approve the July 18, 2024, meeting minutes. Commissioner Bill McDaniel seconded the motion to approve the July 18, 2024, meeting minutes. The motion was approved unanimously.

AGENDA ITEM #7(a)

FINANCIALS: Proposed FY24/25 Budget

Ms. Wuerstle explained that the budget is conservative, based solely on known grants and contracts, without projections. Initially, the budget showed an end balance of \$53,000, but it now shows \$169,000 due to the incorporation of \$288,000 in reserves, which offsets a \$118,000 income loss.

Commissioner McDaniel acknowledges the improvement from the previous version of the budget, thanks to the inclusion of reserves. Both Ms. Wuerstle and Commissioner McDaniel expressed hope for additional grants to further improve the financial outlook. The reserves, which are unrestricted, can be used for operational deficits.

Commissioner McDaniel notes that the current budget provides about a year of stability, even though it's not fully satisfactory. Mr. McCormick commends Margaret and Rebekah for preparing an effective budget.

Councilman Fred Burson offered a motion to approve the Proposed FY24/25 Budget. Commissioner Bill McDaniel seconded the motion to approve the Proposed FY24/25 Budget. The motion was approved unanimously.

AGENDA ITEM #7(b)

FINANCIALS: April – August Financials

Ms. Wuerstle explained that the organization's financials were concerning earlier in the year, with reserves down to \$134,000 in April. However, by August, reserves had improved to over \$288,000, following a typical financial cycle. Ms. Harp added that more income will be

recognized as several grants close out in September and October, including a possible \$150,000 from a USDA grant.

Commissioner McDaniel raised concerns about the high consulting fees, particularly for a Brownfield grant, where \$300,000 is being paid to a consultant. He questioned the viability of such expenses, suggesting that internal resources or other counties could potentially handle some of the work to save costs. Commissioner McDaniel also requested a detailed breakdown of income, expenses, consultant fees, salaries, and staff structure.

Ms. Wuerstle clarified that while consultants do most of the work, the organization benefits by receiving administrative funds from grants, helping improve the RPC's financial standing. McDaniel emphasized the need for better income streams and suggested that the organization should carefully evaluate grant opportunities and the costs of managing them.

The discussion also touched on the potential for collaboration with other counties to share resources and reduce costs. Ms. Wuerstle stated that while the organization must contract with consultants for site assessments, such arrangements still benefit local communities, and the brownfield grant was submitted at the request of Glades County.

**Councilman Fred Burson offered a motion to approve the April – August Financials.
Commissioner Bill McDaniel seconded the motion to approve the April – August Financials.
The motion was approved unanimously.**

**AGENDA ITEM #8
CONSENT AGENDA: None**

**AGENDA ITEM #9
DIRECTORS REPORT**

Ms. Wuerstle brought up a request from the Myakka River Management Coordinating Council to appoint a new representative, as the previous appointee, Ms. Williams, has not participated for some time. The council is struggling to establish quorums, and they asked either for a new appointment or for the organization to withdraw its membership. Ms. Wuerstle informed the group that they lack the resources to assign someone but wanted input before making a final decision.

Commissioner McDaniel agreed that no one is available or willing to serve and suggested they decline the seat on the council, citing the organization's upcoming reorganization. He added that they can reconsider in the future if the organization grows in membership. The group concurred and Ms. Wuerstle confirmed that she would communicate their decision to the council.

AGENDA ITEM #9(a)(b)(c)
Executive Director's Contract
Executive Directors Compensation Matrix
Attorney General Opinion: Planning Council Member Must Pay its Share of Dues

Ms. Wuerstle presented her employment contract for review, which had not been updated since 2018. Commissioner McDaniel pointed out that the contract should have been reviewed annually but wasn't, likely due to disruptions like COVID-19. The group agreed to conduct a performance review by the end of the year, and Ms. Wuerstle will send previous review samples to all members.

Upon the arrival of Councilman Ron Smith there was also additional discussion about the Myakka River Management Coordinating Council appointment, with Councilman Smith expressing interest in more information. The group decided to withdraw their seat for now, with the possibility of rejoining later.

Finally, the board discussed whether to hold a retreat for reorganization. Most members, including Commissioner McDaniel, expressed disinterest in a retreat until reorganization is completed. The topic of an Attorney General opinion from 1995, which states counties must pay their assessments, was also briefly touched upon but dismissed by Commissioner McDaniel as not actionable.

AGENDA ITEM #9(d)(e)(f)
FRCA Monthly Activity Report – July 2024
FRCA Monthly Activity Report – August 2024
Promise Zone Grants (Informational)

Commissioner McDaniel asks about the FRCA Monthly Activity Report and the Promise Zone. Ms. Wuerstle highlighted that while \$42 million in grants for the Promise Zone were denied, significant effort was made in applying for them. Despite the denials, \$5 million in grants have been successfully secured. She also mentioned the RPC's ongoing work, including the Rural Regional Development Grants for FHERO, which have been approved, and stated that the RPC is waiting news on a \$500,000 NOAA grant for the shrimp industry.

AGENDA ITEM #9(g)
Government Fund History (Informational)

Commissioner McDaniel asked about the report on governmental funding activity. Ms. Harp explained that it is an historical overview of income and net balances, showing how funding has changed over the years. Commissioner McDaniel noted that in 2006, the organization received \$3.2 million from grants and membership fees. Ms. Wuerstle explained that was before her time. The organization received annual state funding of around \$250,000, which ended in 2012 when the governor vetoed it, leading to a significant drop in funds. There were no further questions or comments on the report.

**AGENDA ITEM #10
COMMITTEE REPORTS**

No Committee Reports were given.

**AGENDA ITEM #10(a)
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

There was no update given.

**AGENDA ITEM #10(b)
QUALITY OF LIFE & SAFETY COMMITTEE**

There was no update given.

**AGENDA ITEM #11
NEW BUSINESS**

Mr. Flood asked Commissioner McDaniel if he had heard back from the governor's office. Commissioner McDaniel replied that he had not received any communication, despite previous promises from a lawyer who said the governor's chief of staff would reach out. He mentioned calling again without success. Following this, Commissioner McDaniel moved on to hear from state agencies.

**AGENDA ITEM #12
STATE AGENCIES COMMENTS/REPORTS**

Mr. Flood announced that the DEP (Department of Environmental Protection) will hold a series of workshops about water quality for Lake Okeechobee, the west coast, and the east coast. A meeting focused on the Caloosahatchee River and Everglades' west coast will be held in Fort Myers on October 22nd at 9 AM, with another in LaBelle that afternoon. Registration is not required, as the events are in-person only.

Mr. Flood also mentioned that \$53 million was awarded to build a new field station in Clewiston. He provided updates on legislative meetings, which begin in December ahead of the March 4th session. Florida's economy is currently strong, with a \$2 billion surplus expected for the next fiscal year. However, a \$3 billion shortfall is anticipated the following year. Mr. Flood encouraged local governments to begin planning legislative funding requests.

AGENDA ITEM #13 COUNCIL MEMBERS' COMMENTS

Councilman Kramer discussed a long-awaited \$120 million stormwater project in Southwest Florida, which includes upgrading the current gravity system with backflow preventers and pump stations, enhancing the stormwater management system. Commissioner McDaniel supported the effort.

Councilman Smith expressed his disappointment in the previous workshop meeting, where he hoped for more guidance on the organization's direction. He also shared frustrations over his city's refusal to pay dues for the organization, despite his efforts.

Commissioner McDaniel outlined his upcoming plan to reorganize the SWFRPC structure by amending bylaws and engaging local counties and municipalities. He intends to get county commissioners to support the RPC's financial stability and regional collaboration, and to enhance participation across counties. Other council members express support for these initiatives.

AGENDA ITEM #14 ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 10:32 a.m.
Full audio is available: September 19, 2024 Zoom



Councilwoman Debi Lux, Secretary

The meeting was duly advertised in the September 6, 2024, issue of the FLORIDA ADMINISTRATIVE REGISTER, Volume 50, Number 175.