

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

The virtual zoom meeting of the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council’s Executive Board was held on December 19, 2024. Collier County Commissioner and Council Chair, Mr. Bill McDaniel called the meeting to order at 10:01 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: Commissioner Michael Atkinson

Lee County: None

Sarasota County: Councilman Ron Smith – City of Venice

Ex-Officio Members: None

OTHERS PRESENT

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

Commissioner Bill McDaniel offered a motion to allow online members to participate and vote. Councilman Ron Smith seconded the motion to allow online members to participate and vote. The motion was approved unanimously.

AGENDA

AGENDA ITEM #6(a)(b)

MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 19, 2024, COUNCIL/EXECUTIVE MEETING

MINUTES OF THE OCTOBER 17, 2024, COUNCIL/EXECUTIVE MEETING

Councilman Ron Smith offered a motion to accept the September 19, 2024, meeting minutes and the October 17, 2024, meeting minutes. Commissioner Bill McDaniel seconded the motion to accept the September 19, 2024, meeting minutes and the October 17, 2024, meeting minutes. The motion was approved unanimously.

AGENDA ITEM #7(a)(b)

FINANCIALS: October Financials

Draft Comparison of Assessments (Current vs. Proposed)

Ms. Wuerstle explained that this is the first month of the fiscal year, and as of now, the organization is operating with a net income of slightly over \$10,000. She shared good news that they have secured an additional grant of \$282,000 for resiliency efforts. All the RPCs are participating in this project through FRCA, with each receiving \$7,000 to assist FRCA in compiling the necessary information. However, SWFRPC will also receive an additional \$175,000 on top of the \$7,000. This funding will significantly improve the organization's financial position for the year. Although the contract has not yet been finalized, it is expected to be in place by next week.

Commissioner McDaniel asked what the resiliency was for.

Ms. Wuerstle responded that what they want us to do for this Regional Resiliency Project is to collect all the resiliency plans from our region and compare them to see if and where there are any gaps. Then collaborate with surrounding municipalities and counties to ensure that we are going to be stronger in future storms. That is what the state is asking us to do.

Commissioner McDaniel asked if it is a collection of studies that have already been conducted or is it to help those that don't have them.

Ms. Wuerstle responded that it is for those that do not have them also. First, we collect and find out who has them and who doesn't have them, see if there's gaps, then help our communities prepare a plan if they don't have one.

Ms. Wuerstle responded by explaining that only one issue popped out on the financials, which was the advertising budget that shows almost \$15,000 and we only had budgeted \$1,600. However, those were the TV ads that were run through a grant for marketing the SWFL Fresh brand. In your next financial packet that will be addressed because the grant will have paid for the advertising and we will be reimbursed for that money.

Ms. Wuerstle explained that the new MOU, once it is adopted by everyone, reduces the assessments from \$.30 to \$.15.

Commissioner McDaniel requested that the revenues be segregated as only the six member counties of the RPC are obligated to pay. The updated MOU and bylaws aim to reduce the fee from \$0.30 per diem to \$0.15 and limit the number of seats per county, with the goal of reengaging the counties in the first quarter. Once the two commissioners and municipalities from each county participate, additional municipalities can be invited.

Commissioner McDaniel continued to explain that once the municipalities are invited back as a paying member, then the county's amount per diem will be reduced based on the city's contributions.

Ms. Wuerstle explained that this is already being done. The county's quarterly assessment is reduced by the city's contribution.

Commissioner Atkinson requested a copy of the new MOU and Bylaws.

Commissioner McDaniel continued to reiterate that he would like to be on each of the county agendas in the first quarter.

Ms. Wuerstle explained that it is her understanding that before we can go to the new rate of \$.15 or any changes in the new MOU and Bylaws, we need all of the counties to sign off on it. Ms. Wuerstle stated that we could use the council's help with a legal opinion in determining if this is accurate. Ms. Wuerstle continued asking for clarification and stated, since Collier County adopted the MOU, but for example, Hendry County does not, do we operate under two different MOUs and are we billing two different amounts?

Commissioner McDaniel responded that whoever pays gets to vote and who doesn't pay doesn't get to vote. Commissioner McDaniel explains to Commissioner Atkinson counties yet to adopt will remain under the existing fee structure (\$0.30) and MOU and that we do not need a legal opinion for what is already in place. Commissioner McDaniels' goal is to achieve full adoption of the new MOU and revitalize membership by the first quarter of 2025. He plans to meet with counties the counties, especially Sarasota, Lee and Charlotte first to present the new bylaws, explain benefits, and encourage participation.

Ms. Wuerstle asked if Collier County should be billed for the \$.15 now that they have adopted the new MOU and Bylaws?

Commissioner McDaniel stated that the SWFRPC should proceed with billing the \$.30 rate. However, Collier County has adopted a new fee structure of \$.15 and will only pay that amount, potentially resulting in a deficit. The current MOU specifies a rate of \$.30 per diem, while the new MOU, once adopted, will establish a rate of \$.15 per diem. Include this as a note on the billing, and if any questions arise, provide the updated Bylaws and MOU reflecting the \$.15 rate.

Councilman Ron Smith offered a motion to accept the October financials. Commissioner Bill McDaniel seconded the motion to accept the October financials. The motion was accepted unanimously.

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

**AGENDA ITEM #9
DIRECTORS REPORT**

Ms. Wuerstle reported that only four of the directors' evaluations have been received so far. She mentioned that several notices have been sent out and assured that reminders will continue to be sent. Ms. Wuerstle added that she believes the council intended to review this item at the next meeting in January, to which Commissioner McDaniel concurred.

Ms. Wuerstle reported that the packet includes a resolution regarding the US 27 rail. Both the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council and the South Florida Regional Planning Council have adopted this resolution, urging the Department of Transportation to conduct the necessary engineering studies to advance the interior rail project. She emphasized the importance of this initiative, noting that it aligns with years of work on the inland port, particularly in Hendry County, and would significantly benefit that project. Ms. Wuerstle added that they have requested our consideration in adopting this resolution.

Commissioner McDaniel inquired whether the resolution needs to be adopted today. Ms. Wuerstle responded that it could be addressed at the January meeting. Commissioner McDaniel requested that it be brought forward at that time.

Councilman Ron Smith asked if someone could provide a presentation to us at that time. Ms. Wuerstle replied that she would request the Executive Director of the Treasure Coast RPC to present and asked if it would be acceptable to present via Zoom? The council members agreed.

Ms. Wuerstle noted that a few significant developments occurred after the agenda was finalized and are not included. She shared that representatives from the Netherlands have expressed interest in collaborating with us. They have allocated funding in their budget to send engineers or other specialists to work with us. However, they have requested that we hold a virtual meeting after the first of the year to discuss the impacts of recent hurricanes, our recovery efforts, and the remaining needs. This will help them better understand our situation and determine who to send.

Ms. Wuerstle also mentioned that the Tampa Bay RPC has expressed interest in hosting the Netherlands team in their region as well. She has reached out to them, and both RPCs will coordinate a virtual meeting to present to the representatives from the Netherlands. Ms. Wuerstle emphasized the importance of including individuals from this region, particularly members of the board, in the meeting. She inquired if there is a preferred time for the meeting, suggesting it take place around the end of January or the beginning of February. Ms. Wuerstle also asked whether the members would prefer to schedule it during one of the regular meetings or hold it as a separate meeting.

Councilman Smith replied that he would prefer the meeting to be held during a regularly scheduled meeting, as the members would already be available since they have that date reserved on their calendars.

Commissioner McDaniel suggested postponing this initiative until March, noting that the legislative session is starting early this year. He explained that he, along with many others, will be traveling to Tallahassee during this time. Commissioner McDaniel also notes that he is ok with a virtual meeting anytime, not just during a regularly scheduled meeting. At that time, we will invite all of our members, those that are voting, paying, and non-paying—to participate and proceed from there.

Ms. Wuerstle asked Commissioner Atkinson if he had a preference for a date of the virtual meeting, during a regular meeting or anytime? Commissioner Atkinson stated that anytime would work. Ms. Wuerstle asked Mr. McCormick, and he stated he is good with whatever is decided.

Ms. Wuerstle shared additional news, stating that EDA, FEMA, USDA, and HUD will be holding listening sessions again to assess the impacts, recovery efforts, and outstanding needs related to Hurricanes Helene and Milton. Similar sessions were previously held for Hurricane Ian. During a meeting with EDA, it was mentioned that \$1.5 billion in funding is expected to be allocated for hurricane recovery efforts. However, it's unclear whether this funding is intended for the entire East Coast, only for Florida, or something else. Ms. Wuerstle noted uncertainty about whether the funding will even be approved, given recent news developments. The agencies plan to hold these sessions at all RPCs impacted by the hurricanes, and the tentative timeline for our region is the last two weeks of February.

Ms. Wuerstle explained that during the previous sessions, attendees were provided with forms to detail specific projects requesting funding, such as infrastructure or other recovery needs. These completed forms were submitted at the end of the workshop, and while not all projects were funded after Hurricane Ian, several were.

To maximize this opportunity, Ms. Wuerstle emphasized the importance of reaching out to communities to identify their specific hurricane-related impacts and projects. These projects need to be documented on the forms and submitted during the sessions to increase the likelihood of receiving funding, if the supplemental is approved.

Commissioner McDaniel stated that the SWFRPC is taking the lead and asked whether, aside from the availability of funding, there is a list outlining the types of projects that will be eligible for funding.

Ms. Wuerstle explained that until the NOFA (Notice of Funding Availability) is released, the specific regulations and guidelines will remain unclear. However, she noted that each federal agency typically focuses on different priorities. For example, EDA tends to fund economic development projects and small business initiatives, while FEMA has a completely different focus. After Hurricane Ian, HUD funded a food insecurity project to the SWFRPC. She added that the listening sessions would be an excellent opportunity to ask the agencies about their priorities and the types of projects they are targeting, as they often have preferred project categories, even if not explicitly stated.

Commissioner McDaniel responded that there's no point in reaching out to everyone until it's confirmed whether the funding will be made available. Once that determination is made, outreach can be conducted with members and the relevant agencies to seek specific allowances for expenditures. This would help ensure, for example, that Hendry County isn't submitting a request for a road that wasn't impacted or something similar.

Ms. Wuerstle responded affirmatively, explaining that they need to find a facility with Zoom capabilities and the ability to accommodate refreshments, such as coffee, donuts in the morning, and lunch in the afternoon. Not all venues allow this. She mentioned that they are currently considering the Charlotte Harbor Event Center and the regional library in Fort Myers, both of which have excellent facilities.

Commissioner McDaniel asked how many attendees are expected. Ms. Wuerstle estimated 60 to 80, noting that this location would be a bit too small for that number.

Commissioner McDaniel mentioned the FDOT facility, which had been suggested as a potential venue for relocating future RPC meetings near I-75. However, he noted that its security requirements and capacity of around 40 would make it unsuitable for this particular event. While he didn't receive a definitive "no" when discussing the facility, he is still working on the possibility of relocating RPC meetings there in the future.

Ms. Wuerstle explained that they will keep everyone updated on the progress, including the date to be set. She noted that they have already started compiling a list of individuals who need to be contacted and involved in these meetings, and that it would be ideal to have elected officials in attendance.

Commissioner McDaniel asked if there was any idea of when the meetings would take place. Ms. Wuerstle responded that they are looking at the last two weeks of February. She added that dates were offered in both January and February, but more time is needed to secure a venue—preferably one that can be donated—reach out to the necessary participants, ensure forms are completed, and coordinate attendance. Therefore, the last two weeks of February seem most likely.

Ms. Wuerstle explained that the meeting will be held in person with a Zoom option available. She also noted that the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program has requested two separate meetings—one for their Policy Board and another for their management meeting—and EDA has already agreed to those. However, she emphasized that there are distinct issues in this region that necessitate a separate meeting specifically for addressing local concerns.

Ms. Wuerstle stated that she believes Charlotte Harbor’s meeting is scheduled for January 23rd. She added that once she has more details, she will send out notices. She noted that it’s a positive step to have their attention and, hopefully, the supplemental funding will be approved.

AGENDA ITEM #9(a)(b)
Executive Director’s Evaluation
Executive Directors Compensation Matrix (Informational)

Will be discussed during January’s meeting.

AGENDA ITEM #9(c)
Resolution #24-01 US 27 Rail

Tabled until next meeting.

AGENDA ITEM #9(d)
Proposed 2025 Meeting Schedule

Ms. Wuerstle reported that the only other item in the packet is the meeting schedule for next year. All meetings are set for the 3rd Thursday of each month, however if there are any conflicts, please let her know.

AGENDA ITEM #9(e)
FRCA Monthly Activity Report – October 2024 (Informational)

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

Commissioner McDaniel asked about the government fund history item and Ms. Wuerstle responded that it was requested to include as an agenda item each month.

AGENDA ITEM #10
COMMITTEE REPORTS

There were no Committee Reports.

AGENDA ITEM #10(a)
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

There was no update given.

AGENDA ITEM #11
NEW BUSINESS

Councilman Smith inquired about a member who had recently passed away. It was confirmed that Mr. Mel Karau was the council member who had recently passed. The board discussed whether it would be appropriate to send flowers or another form of acknowledgment.

Commissioner McDaniel suggested that the SWFRPC send a signed letter honoring Mr. Karau's service, along with condolences, and make a \$50 donation to the charity specified in his announcement.

Commissioner Atkinson confirmed that Mr. Karau's service will take place in LaBelle on December 28th.

Councilman Ron Smith offered a motion to send a \$50 donation, letter and acknowledgment in memory of Council member Mr. Mel Karau. Commissioner Bill McDaniel seconded the motion to send a \$50 donation, letter and acknowledgment in memory of Council member Mr. Mel Karau. The motion was accepted unanimously.

AGENDA ITEM #12
STATE AGENCIES COMMENTS/REPORTS

None.

AGENDA ITEM #13
COUNCIL MEMBERS' COMMENTS

Mr. Don McCormick reminded the board that he has been serving as the RPC representative for the CHNEP Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership for approximately 12 years. He expressed that it is time to appoint a new representative and requested that it be added to the agenda for discussion at next month's meeting. Ms. Wuerstle confirmed that it has been noted for next month.

Councilman Smith shared that Venice has hired a coastal engineering firm to study potential improvements to mitigate flooding from stormwater. He noted that flooding in the Venice area was severe after the last two storms. During their initial presentation to the public, the firm mentioned they would be consulting with experts from the Netherlands, which he found interesting. The firm is now working on the project, which is expected to take six months, and Councilman Smith expressed his eagerness to review the data once it becomes available. He also assured that he would keep them informed.

Ms. Wuerstle asked if he would like her to reach out to them to involve them in the webinar. Councilman Smith agreed and would greatly appreciate it.

AGENDA ITEM #14
ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 10:41 a.m.



Bill McDaniel jr (Apr 25, 2025 19:25 EDT)

Commissioner Bill McDaniel, Chair

The meeting was duly advertised in the December 6, 2024, issue of the FLORIDA ADMINISTRATIVE REGISTER, Volume 50, Number 237.