SWLA Regional Planning Commission

Louisiana Planning District 5

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
MEETING
Wednesday, March 25, 2026, Noon
2nd Floor, East Conference Room
HENNING SEED CENTER
4310 Ryan Street, Lake Charles, LA 70605
ZOOM: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9583967845

MINUTES

I. Call to Order — Mr. Jacob Dillehay, Chair

II. Roll Call — Mr. Mike Hollier, Director

Mr. Jacob Dillehay – Responded Present
Mayor Hal McMillan – Responded Present
Ms. Mary Kaye Eason – Responded Present
Mr. Ben Boudreaux – Responded Present
Ms. Lisa Adams – Responded Present
Ms. Katie Armentor – Responded Present
Mayor Mike Danahay – No Response
Mayor Michael Harris – No Response
Ms. Kim Monte – No Response
Ms. Carter Prejean – Responded Present
Mayor Marshall Simien – No Response
Mayor David Vidrine – Responded Present
Mayor Neal Watkins – Responded Present

III. Reading and Adoption of Minutes — Ms. Mary Kaye Eason, Secretary

A. Draft Minutes of Meeting held on February 18, 2026
Action requested.

A MOTION to dispense reading of the minutes of the meeting held February 18, 2026, was made by Mayor David Vidrine and seconded by Mayor Hal McMillen. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

A MOTION to adopt the minutes of the meeting held February 18, 2026, was made by Mayor Hal McMillen and seconded by Mayor David Valdrine. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

IV. Financial Reports

Mr. Ben Boudreaux
Treasurer

A. January 2026 Financial Report
Action requested.

Mr. Ben Boudreaux reviewed the January financial report and stated that total income for the month was $205,101 and total expenses were $151,585, resulting in a net income of $53,515. Total balances for SWLA-RPC resulted in $482,898. This concluded Mr. Ben Boudreaux's report.

A MOTION to approve the January 2026 Financial Report was made by Mayor Neal Watkins and seconded by Mayor David Valdrine. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

B. February 2026 Financial Report
Action requested.

The February financials are currently being reconciled and will be presented at a future meeting. No action was taken.

C. Resolution No. 2342 Approving and Authorizing an Increase in the SWLA-RPC Credit Card Limit to $20,000.

Ms. Jamie Gaines
Assistant Director

Action requested.

Ms. Jamie Gaines explained that the agency's current credit limit of $3,000 restricts total monthly spending, regardless of whether the balance is paid off during the billing cycle. It was noted that even when the card is paid in full, charges cannot exceed the $3,000 monthly cap. Due to increased operational needs, including travel expenses and equipment purchases, the agency has exceeded this limit, at times requiring staff to use personal credit cards for business expenses. Monthly charges have exceeded $7,000 in some instances.

Ms. Jamie Gaines emphasized the importance of transitioning all expenses to an agency credit card to ensure continuity of operations and proper financial management, particularly in anticipation of future staff transitions. Accordingly, a request was made to increase the credit card limit to $20,000 to better accommodate operational demands. The agency will continue to pay balances in full each month.

A MOTION to approve Resolution No. 2342 Approving and Authorizing an Increase in the SWLA-RPC Credit Card Limit to $20,000 was made by Mayor Hal McMillen and seconded by Mr. Ben Boudreaux. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

D. Resolution No. 2343 Approving and Authorizing Placement of SWLA-RPC General Financial Accounts into "High Yield Savings Accounts" insured to $15 million. — Ms. Jamie Gaines, Assistant Director

Action requested.

Ms. Jamie Gaines explained that the agency's current investments are primarily in certificates of deposit (CDs), which provide yields comparable to other low-risk options. However, she noted an opportunity through the agency's credit union to move a portion of its cash balances into high-yield savings accounts offering interest rates of up to approximately 4%, compared to the current 0.05% earned on standard checking and savings accounts.

Ms. Gaines emphasized that these high-yield accounts would allow the agency to maintain liquidity for operational needs, including payroll and other expenses. She noted that interest rates would vary based on account balances, with higher balances generating higher yields, but all tiers still exceed current rates. Additionally, she stated that deposits could be insured up to $15 million.

Mayor Hal McMillen raised concerns regarding the need for due diligence when placing public funds and recommended obtaining multiple quotes from financial institutions to ensure transparency and competitiveness.

Ms. Gaines explained that the agency currently maintains a longstanding checking account with Chase Bank for grant-related transactions, which does not earn interest but is necessary due to existing grant structures. She further noted that the agency partners with Southwest Louisiana Credit Union due to its designation as a Community Development Financial Institution and its alignment with regional development goals.

Ms. Gaines stated that the agency has previously evaluated other financial institutions and products; however, this high-yield savings program appears to be unique to their current credit union partnership. She also emphasized that the agency remains mindful of federal insurance limits when allocating funds and routinely shops for the best rates when investing in CDs. The proposed high-yield account would primarily be used for operational cash balances to maintain liquidity while improving interest earnings.

A MOTION to approve Resolution No. 2343 Approving and Authorizing Placement of SWLA-RPC General Financial Accounts into "High Yield Savings Accounts" insured to $15 million, was made by Mr. Ben Boudreaux and seconded by Ms. Katie Armentor. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

E. **Resolution No. 2344 Approving Signature Authorizations for Credit Union Accounts.** — Ms. Jamie Gaines, Assistant Director
Action requested.

Following approval of the high-yield savings account signatories, Ms. Jamie Gaines stated that, requested that the Executive Board be designated as authorized signatories for the account.

A MOTION to approve Resolution No. 2344 Approving Signature Authorizations for Credit Union Accounts, was made by Mayor David Vidrine and seconded by Mr. Ben Boudreaux. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

V. **MGO Connect - Draft Membership Agreement** — Mr. Mike Hollier, Executive Director
Discussion on options, direction, and implementation.

Mr. Mike Hollier provided an update on MGO Connect, referencing a prior presentation by Ryan Hutchinson at a previous board meeting. He explained that MGO Connect operates under the South Central Planning and Development District in Houma and represents a collaborative initiative among local governments to improve operational efficiency, particularly in areas such as permitting and inspections.

Mr. Hollier stated that, following additional research and attendance at the organization's annual conference in New Orleans, he has become increasingly impressed with the program's structure and potential benefits. He highlighted that MGO Connect leverages the expertise of retired high-technology professionals who contribute their services at no cost and noted that the program is active in multiple states.

He emphasized that participation does not require upfront costs and has the potential to improve efficiency, security, and service delivery for local governments. He also noted that some jurisdictions within Louisiana are already utilizing similar systems and applications.

Mr. Hollier further discussed the potential for expansion into additional areas such as public works and neighborhood redevelopment, as well as the organization's focus on advancing technologies, including artificial intelligence applications in permitting and inspection processes. He noted that improving the speed and efficiency of inspections and permitting is a common concern among developers and local governments.

He clarified that participation in MGO Connect would be voluntary for member governments and that no action is required at this time. He indicated his intent to further explore partnership opportunities and stated that a formal agreement will be brought before the Board for consideration at a future meeting.

VI. **Louisiana Watershed Initiative (LWI) Region 4 Draft Comprehensive Plan** — Mr. Harris Quadir, Planner II

Information only. No action is requested.

Mr. Harris Quadir provided an update on the Louisiana Watershed Initiative (Region 4), noting that the Southwest Louisiana Regional Planning Commission serves as the fiscal agent for the region. He reported that a draft of the comprehensive watershed plan has been completed and is currently available on the program's website for public review.

Mr. Harris Quadir explained that the watershed initiative is structured similarly to a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), with representation from each parish and various jurisdictions. He noted that the Region 4 Coalition Policy Council serves as the governing body providing policy direction, while a Technical Advisory Committee, also composed of regional representatives, provides technical input and guidance.

He further stated that the development of the plan included extensive research and evaluation of existing efforts, including those in Calcasieu Parish, as well as consideration of how successful strategies could be expanded to other jurisdictions with fewer resources. The plan incorporates a range of regional issues beyond water management, including adjudicated properties, freshwater aquifer recharge, and reservoir development.

Ms. Jamie Gaines added that the draft plan represents approximately three years of coordinated effort and has been completed in accordance with contractual requirements. She noted that the watershed initiative has faced challenges in securing U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funding for repeat flooding projects, with limited success in certain areas such as the City of Kinder and the City of Lake Charles.

Ms. Gaines stated that the draft plan will be presented to the Region 4 Coalition Policy Council for review at its upcoming meeting on April 21, 2026. If adopted, the plan will then be distributed to local governments for further review and potential action.

Ms. Katie Armentor inquired about where the draft plan is posted and asked whether coordination had occurred with representatives from Cameron Parish. Mr. Quadir confirmed that the plan is available on the Southwest Louisiana Regional Planning Commission website under the Louisiana Watershed Initiative section and that coordination with regional stakeholders has taken place.

Ms. Armentor also noted that Cameron Parish recently adopted its Coastal Master Plan and emphasized the importance of ensuring consistency between regional plans. Mr. Quadir acknowledged this and stated that multiple regional and state plans, including Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) plans, were reviewed to promote alignment and coordinated efforts across jurisdictions.

Mr. Quadir added that the draft plan is currently open for public comment for a limited period and encouraged board members to share the information with their constituents. He emphasized the importance of public input, noting that water management is a critical issue for the region and impacts all residents.

VII. Adjudicated Property Pilot Program Mr. Mike Hollier

Solicitation for two pilot properties.
Information only. No action is requested.

Mr. Mike Hollier presented an overview of the ongoing efforts to address adjudicated properties across Southwest Louisiana. He explained that the issue was initially raised by multiple board members several years ago and noted the complexity of Louisiana's adjudicated property laws, particularly the 30-year redemption period, which significantly limits redevelopment opportunities compared to other states. Mr. Hollier reported that prior efforts to pursue statewide legislative reform to reduce the redemption period were unsuccessful due to opposition. However, he indicated that a more targeted legislative approach limited to Southwest Louisiana may be pursued in the future. Mr. Hollier emphasized that adjudicated properties continue to increase across the region and present challenges for local governments, many of which lack the staffing or resources to effectively manage them. As a result, the Commission has initiated efforts to better identify and track adjudicated properties and address complications such as dual parish and municipal claims.

VIII. Incorporation of Land Bank of Southwest Louisiana Ms. Jamie Gaines

Three fundamental purposes: adjudicated properties, transportation right-of-way, and watershed reservoirs.
Status update.

Mr. Mike Hollier provided an update on the establishment of the Land Bank of Southwest Louisiana, which is currently being developed as a quasi-governmental entity. He explained that participation by local governments would be voluntary and enabled through local ordinances, allowing the land bank to operate within their jurisdictions. The land bank will serve as a tool to manage adjudicated properties and support broader initiatives, including housing, transportation, and watershed-related projects.

Mr. Hollier stated that the Commission is moving toward implementation of a pilot program that will focus on two adjudicated properties in participating jurisdictions. The pilot program will test strategies for property maintenance, redevelopment, and financial recovery. Under the proposed model, the land bank would assume responsibility for property management, including maintenance, leasing, and compliance, with no operational burden placed on local governments.

Mr. Hollier outlined several anticipated benefits of the program, including recovery of back taxes and costs, stabilization of property values, increased occupancy, improved utilization of public infrastructure, and the generation of new property and sales tax revenue. He also noted that the program could help address blight, improve neighborhood conditions, and encourage reinvestment in local communities.

The proposed pilot would utilize small, approximately 625-square-foot "pivot homes," designed to be affordable, movable, and expandable over time. These units would be constructed to modern, fortified standards and placed on adjudicated properties. Rental income would be allocated toward property management, reimbursement of local government costs, and a revolving fund to support future development.

Mr. Hollier further explained that tenants may have the option to participate in an escrow program to build equity toward future homeownership. A "pivot house association" structure would also be established to maintain property standards and ensure neighborhood compatibility.

Board discussion followed regarding program logistics, including square footage requirements, zoning considerations, and financing. Chair Mr. Jacob Dillehay inquired about unit size, and it was confirmed that 625 square feet is the baseline, with potential for expansion. Some concerns were raised regarding minimum square footage requirements in certain jurisdictions.

Ms. Mary Kaye Eason asked about management responsibilities and property locations. Mr. Hollier clarified that the land bank would serve as the managing entity and that properties would be distributed across participating parishes rather than concentrated in a single location. He also confirmed that the land bank would be responsible for enforcement, maintenance, and overall program administration.

Mayor Mike Danahay inquired about property ownership and title issues. Mr. Hollier explained that adjudicated properties cannot obtain clear title for 30 years under current law, but alternative arrangements such as partial interest sales and management agreements may be utilized in the interim.

Discussion also included funding strategies for the pilot program, including private investment, grants, donations, and partnerships with community development financial institutions such as Southwest Louisiana Credit Union. Mr. Hollier emphasized the importance of establishing a revolving fund to sustain long-term operations and support expansion of the program.

Concerns were raised regarding the timeline for acquiring and developing adjudicated properties. Mr. Hollier acknowledged these challenges but stated that the pilot program is expected to provide clarity within 6–8 months on the feasibility and scalability of the approach.

He concluded by noting that, if successful, the program could be expanded throughout the region and potentially serve as a model for other areas.

IX. Houma Field Trip on April 10, 2026 to South Central Planning and Development Commission. Ms. Jamie Gaines

Information only.

Ms. Jamie Gaines announced an upcoming visit to Houma to tour steel construction, including examples of elevated housing. She extended an invitation to board members to attend and noted that the trip may be of particular interest to Ms. Katie Armentor in Cameron Parish.

X. Resolution No. 2340 Approving and Authorizing an Intergovernmental Joint Cooperative Endeavor Agreement between the SWLA-RPC and City of Sulphur, Louisiana for Preparation of the City of Sulphur Safe Streets and Roads For All (SS4A) Safety Action Plan. Ms. Jamie Gaines

Action requested.

Ms. Jamie Gaines reported that the Commission previously assisted the City of Sulphur in preparing an application for a Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) Safety Action Plan grant. She stated that the application was successful resulting in an award of approximately $500,000, with the City providing the required 20% match.

Ms. Gaines explained that the City of Sulphur is now seeking to enter into an Intergovernmental Agreement with the Southwest Louisiana Regional Planning Commission to implement the plan. Accordingly, she requested authorization for the Commission to execute the agreement.

A MOTION to approve Resolution No. 2340 Approving and Authorizing an Intergovernmental Joint Cooperative Endeavor Agreement between the SWLA-RPC and City of Sulphur, Louisiana for Preparation of the City of

Sulphur Safe Streets and Roads For All (SS4A) Safety Action Plan, was made by Mayor Hal McMillan and seconded by Mayor Neal Watkins. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

XI. **Resolution No. 2341 Approving and Authorizing a Memorandum of Understanding between the SWLA-RPC and SOWELA Community Technical College for broadband workforce training assistance.** — Ms. Jamie Gaines
Action requested.

Ms. Jamie Gaines reported that the Commission was awarded a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Broadband and Technical Assistance grant. She explained that a component of the grant includes workforce development through collaboration with SOWELA Community Technical College.

Ms. Gaines stated that the Commission is seeking authorization to enter into an intergovernmental agreement with SOWELA to provide funding for workforce training programs, including support for instructional personnel and the purchase of computer equipment necessary to conduct the training.

Mr. Jacob Dillehay requested clarification regarding the funding structure, specifically whether the Commission would be providing payment to SOWELA. Ms. Gaines confirmed that the grant is fully funded and that approximately $50,000 of the total $356,000 award has been allocated to support SOWELA's training efforts, including both personnel and equipment costs.

A MOTION to approve Resolution No. 2341 Approving and Authorizing a Memorandum of Understanding between the SWLA-RPC and SOWELA Community Technical College for broadband workforce training assistance, was made by Mayor Neal Watkins and seconded by Mayor David Vidrine. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

XII. **SWLA-RPC Housing Initiative Update** — Ms. Mike Hollier
For information only. No action is requested.

Mr. Mike Hollier provided an update on regional housing and workforce initiatives. He stated that, as part of a broader regional initiative, efforts are underway to improve the perception of professional trades by working closely with trade associations and educational institutions.

Mr. Hollier reported that the Commission has held several meetings with the Calcasieu Parish School Board and its trades training program, as well as with superintendents from neighboring parishes, to explore opportunities for workforce development. As part of the adjudicated property pilot program, he noted that two housing units are planned for construction, one utilizing traditional wood-frame construction and the other steel construction.

He further explained that the Calcasieu Parish trades training program is being considered to construct the wood-frame "pivot house" as part of its instructional program. The unit would be built at the trades training facility and then relocated to an adjudicated property site. He noted that program representatives have expressed enthusiasm about participating in this effort.

Mr. Hollier also announced plans to establish an annual awards banquet to recognize excellence in skilled trades. He stated that trade associations would nominate and select honorees in various fields, such as electrical, plumbing, carpentry, and painting. The event is proposed to be hosted annually at the SEED Center and would serve as a way to promote and elevate the perception of skilled trades within the region.

Mr. Hollier noted that there has been positive feedback from stakeholders and expressed optimism about the initiative moving forward.

XIII. Regional Transportation Planning and Development Update Mr. Mike Hollier

a. Rural Planning Organization (RPO)

Mr. Mike Hollier informed the Board of a bipartisan federal bill currently under consideration, known as the Bridges and Safety Infrastructure for Community Success (BASICS) Act. He explained that the legislation proposes funding opportunities for states to establish Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs) to support transportation planning, development, and implementation in areas outside of Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) boundaries.

Mr. Hollier noted that this concept is long overdue in Louisiana and could significantly enhance transportation planning efforts in rural areas. He further stated that the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) Secretary is currently reviewing the concept and exploring potential pathways for implementation, independent of the bill's passage.

b. SWLA Marion "Butch" Fox Rail Research Institute

Mr. Hollier reported that he recently met with the DOTD Secretary to discuss the SWLA Marion "Butch" Fox Rail Research Institute. He stated that the Secretary expressed interest in the initiative and will explore potential funding opportunities; however, no commitments have been made at this time.

c. Expediting implementation of transportation projects: DOTD/MPO/RMA/LOCALS

Mr. Hollier discussed ongoing concerns regarding delays in the implementation of transportation projects, citing bottlenecks within DOTD processes that result in extended timelines.

He reported that he has engaged in discussions with the DOTD Secretary regarding the need to streamline project delivery and reduce administrative delays. As part of this effort, Mr. Hollier stated that he has been given a 30-day timeframe to explore methods to expedite project implementation.

He noted that a pilot effort will focus on accelerating a pavement striping project in the City of Lake Charles, which traditionally may take six to nine months to complete. The goal is to identify opportunities to reduce that timeline and improve overall efficiency.

Mr. Hollier emphasized his commitment to working collaboratively with DOTD headquarters, district offices, and local partners to identify solutions that will expedite transportation improvements throughout Southwest Louisiana, both within and outside MPO boundaries.

XIV. April Meeting Date and Time Ms. Jamie Gaines

To be determined via poll.

XV. Public Comment Chair

No public comment.

XVI. Adjournment Chair

A MOTION to ADJOURN was made by Mayor Hal McMillen and seconded by Ms. Katie Armentor. Hearing no objections, the MOTION to ADJOURN carried.

Jacob Dillehay, Chair

ATTEST:

Michael Hollier

Michael Hollier, AICP
Executive Director