



Louisiana Planning District 5

BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING
Wednesday, January 29, 2025, 12:00 PM
2nd Floor, East Conference Room SEED CENTER,
4310 Ryan Street, Lake Charles, LA 70605
ZOOM: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9583967845>

MINUTES

I. Call to Order

Mayor Marcus Renfrow
Chair

II. Roll Call

Mike Hollier
Director

Mayor Marcus Renfrow – Responded present
Mayor Hal McMillin – No Response
Mayor Nic Hunter – Responded present
Ms. Lisa Adams – Attended Virtually
Ms. Katie Armentor – Responded present
Mayor Mike Danahay – Responded present
Mr. Jacob Dillehay – Responded present
Ms. Mary Kaye Eason – No Response
Mayor Henry Guinn – Responded present
Ms. Kim Monte – No Response
Mr. Ben Boudreaux – Responded present
Mayor Randy Larken – Responded present

III. Reading and Adoption of Minutes

Mayor Nic Hunter
Secretary

Draft Minutes of Meeting held on December 10, 2024
Action requested.

A MOTION to accept the December meeting minutes was made by Mayor Nic Hunter and seconded by Mr. Jacob Dillehay. Hearing no objection, the MOTION carried.

IV. Financial Reports

Mayor Hal McMillin
Treasurer

A. December 2024 Financial Report
Action requested.

Ms. Brittany Shirley reported a net income for December 2024 of (-\$41,865.43), with outstanding receivables of \$230,000.

Ms. Jamie Gaines explained that the extent of outstanding receivables was due to the name change to Southwest Louisiana Regional Planning Commission with the Louisiana Department of Administration, which temporarily impacted reimbursements. The paperwork has now been completed, and the receivables are being dispersed.

B. Resolution No. 2292 Revising and Establishing Annual Dues for Port Membership

Jamie Gaines

Action requested.

Ms. Jamie Gaines asked for a deferral on port dues as executive directors are going back to their boards for approval. A MOTION to defer was made Mayor Nic Hunter and seconded by Mr. Jacob Danahay. Hearing no objection, the MOTION carried.

V. Election of 2025 Board Officers (Effective Feb.1, 2025)

Chair

A. Nominations and Chair Election:

Action requested.

Mayor Marcus Renfrow opened the floor to nominations for Chair. Mr. Jacob Dillehay was nominated by Mayor Nic Hunter with a second by Mayor Henry Guinn.

Mayor Nic Hunter moved to close nominations, with a second from Mr. Ben Boudreaux. Hearing no objections, Mr. Jacob Dillehay was elected Chair.

B. Nominations and Vice-Chair Election:

Action requested.

Mayor Renfrow opened the floor to nominations for Vice-Chair. Mayor Hal McMillin was nominated by Mr. Jacob Dillehay with a second by Mayor Nic Hunter.

Mr. Jacob Dillehay moved to close nominations, with a second from Mayor Hunter. Hearing no objections, Mayor Hal McMillin was elected Vice-Chair.

C. Nominations and Secretary Election:

Action requested.

Mayor Renfrow opened the floor to nominations for Secretary. Ms. Mary Kaye Eason was nominated by Mayor Mike Danahay, with a second by Mayor Nic Hunter.

Mr. Jacob Dillehay moved to close nominations, with a second from Mayor Hunter. Hearing no objections, Ms. Mary Kaye Eason was elected Secretary.

D. Nominations and Treasurer Election:

Action requested.

Mayor Renfrow opened the floor to nominations for Secretary. Mayor Nic Hunter was nominated by Ms. Mary Kaye Eason, with a second by Mayor Henry Guinn.

Mr. Jacob Dillehay moved to close nominations, with a second from Mr. Ben Boudreaux. Hearing no objections, Mayor Nic Hunter was elected Treasurer.

VI. Adjudicated Property Legislation Request Update

Mike Hollier

Information only. No action is requested.

Mr. Mike Hollier reported that a letter was sent to the 14 Southwest Louisiana representatives in the legislature informing them of the board's position on adjudicated properties and requesting the delegation to consider, either through normal regular sessions, special sessions, or constitutional amendments, reducing the redemption period from 30 years to 3 years – just in Southwest Louisiana. He asked board members to need to contact legislators who sit on the committee and ask that they work through this effort. According to Mr. Hollier, a question that has been raised is "...are we not trying to jeopardize heirs to properties with this reduction?" His response is that this is done in 49 other states of the union. It's just a practical application to a problem that everyone in the region is experiencing.

VII. Resolution No. 2293 Approving and Adopting the Jefferson Davis Parish "5 Page Comprehensive Plan" as a Foundational Component of the Southwest Louisiana Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies Plan.

Mike Hollier

Action requested.

Mr. Mike Hollier thanked the Jefferson Davis Parish Administrator, Mr. Ben Boudreaux, for facilitating the adopting of the Jefferson Davis "5 Page Comprehensive Plan", which is now ready for board consideration.

Mr. Hollier explained that this plan goes into the foundation of our regional comprehensive plan.

Mr. Ben Boudreaux stated that Jefferson Davis Parish has a lot of needs, but there has been a lack of direction. He stated that the 5 Page Comprehensive Plan is not a perfect plan, but will be reviewed, adjusted or reprioritized over time.

A MOTION was made to adopt the Jefferson Davis "5 Page Comprehensive Plan" by Mayor Henry Guinn and seconded by Mayor Nic Hunter. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

VIII. Tracking SWLA Regional Cooperative Initiatives

Mike Hollier

For information only. No action is requested.

Mr. Mike Hollier reported that several board members have asked about various aspects of what the RPC is doing, how we're doing it, and if there is any way we can assist. He stated that he will bring two of the various cooperative initiatives currently in play to the board's attention each meeting.

The first of these initiatives is the Water Utility Optimization Program, which was created several years ago. The Water Utility Optimization Program is about how we can facilitate the local governments with their water districts, if separate from their municipalities, on optimizing the efficiencies of their operations. Part of that was remote meter readings, which Mayor Henry Guinn was heavily involved at that time. Mayor Bob Hardy of Westlake was also heavily involved in this program.

In Mr. Hollier's opinion, remote meter reading and the automation of our infrastructure is really where we should be working and focusing dollars.

In addition to Water Utility Optimization, the RPC Cooperative Initiatives Program include:

- a. Managing Public Easements and Servitudes
- b. Underground Utilities Program
- c. Street/Road Overlay Program
- d. Main Street Program
- e. Grant Applications Preparation & Management
- f. GIS Technology Development & Coordination
- g. Regional Housing Program
- h. Watershed Coordination

- i. Utilities Infrastructure Funding
- j. Roadways Transportation Planning
- k. Economic Planning and Development
- l. Comprehensive Plans
- m. Public Transportation Planning, Development & Coordination
- n. Regional Rail Planning and Development
- o. Resiliency Planning and Development
- p. Regional Hike and Bike Planning and Development
- q. Pilot Projects
- r. Cybersecurity Monitoring

Mr. Hollier noted that the board previously approved a pilot housing program in Lake Arthur, which he is cautiously optimistic about the funding that may be secured for it. He stated that the current problem is finding an entity to execute, manage, and run with it. He stated that his personal recommendation is the Calcasieu Public Trust, which serves all five parishes of Southwest Louisiana.

IX. Resolution No. 2298 Approving and Authorizing a Memorandum of Understanding between the SWLA-RPC and IRON LEV.

Mike Hollier

Action requested.

Mr. Mike Hollier reported that the RPC is in the final stages of completing a Regional Rail study and plan. One of the recommendations coming out of this resolution is to establish a rail research institute for Southwest Louisiana. As a result, he had conversations with the Port of Lake Charles, Kelvin Melton at Chenault, the President of McNeese University, and the Chancellor at SOWELA, to see if they had any interest in establishing something that could research and facilitate rail applications and development in the area. They were all very supportive. They just don't have the money to do it.

According to Mr. Hollier recently had a meeting with Mr. Joe Donohue, Secretary of the DOTD, who said that DOTD has a little pot of money for rail development. Mr. Hollier and Mr. Donohue had a conversation about a rail institute and how it might look.

During development of the Regional Rail Study and Plan, staff inadvertently came across IronLev, an Italian firm that is researching and developing more advanced rail technology than in the U.S., in Mr. Hollier's opinion. Over time, there have been several conversations with

the IronLev representatives. Mr. Hollier also brought this to the DOTD Secretary's attention.

The interest in IronLev from a staff perspective has led Mr. Hollier to requesting a memorandum of understanding to continue discussions with the company. There is no funding commitment and no cost to this board. This is just to continue sharing information and determining how best we facilitate rail needs and research and development in our respective realms. Mr. Hollier reported that he is cautiously optimistic that we can advance something.

Discussion ensued, including Mayor Nic Hunter's question if this is economic development. Mr. Hollier replied that roads, waterways, and rail are economic development. Jeff Davis Parish has Rail Logic, which is a substantial, heavy-duty investment. The rail plan identifies the rail bridge over the Calcasieu being built in 1904, and yet that is a critical link in the national network. Port of Vinton would like rail but was blocked by the construction of Interstate 10. Other parishes, such as Beauregard and Allen, look at rail as their ports. Out of prioritization emphasis, we see rail research as a means to help facilitate these needs.

A MOTION to defer discussion until the board had an opportunity to learn more about the company was made by Mayor Hunter and seconded by Mayor Mike Danahay.

Mr. Ben Boudreaux asked what kind of time effort this would entail from a human resources perspective. Mr. Hollier stated that he is not anticipating very much since this is an exploratory effort. He stated that IronLev is far more advanced in research and technology. One of his comments to Mr. Donahue was that every mode of transportation that we talk about is always about government underwriting, primarily. What is different about rail is that it has historically been left to the private sector. We have spent so much time in the last 50, 60, and 70 years on highways, air, and other modes of transportation investments, and rail research and development has declined. Rail companies are essentially monopolies with little to no motivation to advance technology.

Mr. Hollier referenced a letter to the legislative delegation about creating a Regional Mobility Authority, and the Secretary is very much in favor and supportive of that effort. Mr. Hollier said when we talk about the rail institute, we don't necessarily see the RPC managing it. It would probably be McNeese State University. In the interim, just to get it going, staff is handling it.

Ms. Mary Kaye Eason asked if conversations about rail were referring to freight and commercial. Mr. Hollier agreed, then stipulated that IronLev is researching high speed rails and intracity transportation, and referenced people movers, the most famous of which is at the University

of West Virginia. The federal government underwrote the cost for a people mover, which was a prohibitively costly, major infrastructure.

IronLev is interested in bypassing all of that by utilizing existing rail infrastructure rather than having to build new, and reducing the cost to do that. IronLev has inner city connections.

Ms. Katie Armentor asked who the RPC's in-house council was, and if he or she had reviewed the MOU. She referenced a clause that states the governing laws are the laws of Switzerland. She said that she would feel better if an attorney looked at that specific clause.

Ms. Mary Kaye Eason stated that there was an initiative to create high speed rail between Houston and Dallas that just went away. She asked if that was a project that could be learned from.

Mayor Marcus Renfrow stated that there was a MOTION to defer discussion made by Mayor Hunter and seconded by Mayor Mike Danahay. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

**X. Southwest Louisiana Regional Transit Summit
Changing Strategies**

Mike Hollier

For information only. No action is requested.

Mr. Mike Hollier reported plans to host a Regional Transit Summit to bring in various parties that have driver and other transportation issues in Southwest Louisiana. This would give us the opportunity not only to understand the issues they all have but provide possible solutions.

**XI. Public Survey Questions on Cooperative Initiatives
Underground Utilities? Transportation?**

Mike Hollier

For information only. No action is requested.

Mr. Mike Hollier posed a suggestion about hosting public surveys to get public opinion and individual input on topics that members are confronted with in their communities.

XII. February Meeting Date and Time

Chair

For information only. No action is requested.

Ms. Jamie Gaines will send a placeholder for Wednesday, March 12, 2025.

XIII. Public Comment

Chair

Mayor Nic Hunter reported that Mayor Hal McMillin is doing well.

XIV. Adjournment


Chair

MOTION to adjourn was made by Mayor Nic Hunter and seconded by Mayor Henry Guinn. Hearing no objections, MOTION carried.



Jacob Dillehay, Chair

ATTEST:



Michael Hollier, AICP
Executive Director