SWLA Regional Planning Commission

Louisiana Planning District 5

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Wednesday, June 24, 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 McMillin - Responded Present
Ms. Mary Kaye Eason - Responded Present
Mr. Ben Boudreaux - Responded Present
Ms. Lisa Adams - No Response
Ms. Katie Armentor - Responded present
Mayor Mike Danahay - No Response
Mayor Michael Harris - Responded Present
Ms. Kim Montie - Responded Present
Ms. Carter Prejean - Responded Present
Mayor Marshall Simien - Responded Present
Mayor David Vidrine - No Response
Mayor Neal Watkins - Responded Present

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

A. Draft Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting held on March 25, 2026
Action requested.

A MOTION to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting held March 25, 2026, was made by Mayor Neal Watkins and seconded by Mr. Ben Boudreaux. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

A MOTION to adopt the minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting held March 25, 2026, was made by Mr. Ben Boudreaux and seconded by Mayor Hal McMillin. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

B. Draft Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting held on May 13, 2026
Action Requested.

A MOTION to dispense reading of the minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting held May 13, 2026, was made by Mayor Hal McMillin and seconded by Ms. Kim Montie. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

A MOTION to adopt the minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting held May 13, 2026, was made by Mr. Ben Boudreaux and seconded by Mayor Hal McMillin. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

IV. Financial Reports Mr. Ben Boudreaux
Treasurer

A. April 2026 Financial Report
Action requested.

Mr. Ben Boudreaux reviewed the April financial report and stated that total income for the month was $141,693.82 and total expenses were $144,115.56 resulting in a net income of -$2,421.74. Total assets for SWLA-RPC are $1,064,631.53.

A MOTION to approve the April 2026 Financial Report was made by Mayor Hal McMillin and seconded by Mayor Neal Watkins. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

V. Resolution No. 2345 Approval and Adoption of Administrative Memorandum No. 11, including FY2026-2027 Budget. Mr. Mike Hollier
Action requested.

Mr. Mike Hollier opened the discussion by emphasizing that this resolution was likely the most important item on the day's agenda. He explained that the proposed budget establishes the framework for how the Southwest Louisiana Regional Planning Commission (SWLA-RPC) will operate over the next 12 months. While describing the proposal as a standard budget, Mr. Hollier noted that it represents the largest budget in the organization's history.

Mr. Hollier highlighted several key items within the proposal. First, he reminded the Board that the agency's long-term goal has been to maintain a reserve account balance of $250,000. Because SWLA-RPC administers numerous federal grants and federal government shutdowns periodically delay reimbursements, the agency must maintain sufficient reserves to continue operating until funds are received. Although the agency ultimately receives reimbursement, the timing is often uncertain. Given the organization's continued growth and anticipated expansion,

Mr. Hollier recommended increasing the reserve by an additional $30,000.
Mr. Hollier further explained that several major grant applications have reportedly been approved, although official award notices have not yet been received. Should those grants be awarded within the next 30 to 90 days, he would return to the Board with an amended budget to incorporate the additional funding. He stressed that there was nothing negative about the proposed budget and reiterated that the primary changes involved increasing the reserve account while anticipating future grant awards.

Mr. Hollier also discussed several activities included within the budget, including the adjudicated property and housing pilot initiatives. He noted that the Board had previously approved approximately $25,000 for the housing initiative and expressed optimism that, by August, staff would have a clearer understanding of the pilot program's financing requirements. He reiterated that the proposed budget was straightforward and primarily intended to position the agency for anticipated growth.

Mr. Hollier also remarked that one of the greatest challenges encountered when pursuing grants is securing the required local matching funds. Although funding opportunities frequently arise, the agency often must scramble to identify matching funds before applications can be submitted. He concluded his presentation by inviting questions regarding the memorandum.
Ms. Bonnie Jo Bahnsen asked whether Item 17, Regional Downtown Initiative, listed under the expense section of Memorandum No. 11, was associated with the Just Imagine Plan.

Ms. Jamie Gaines responded that the expense was more closely aligned with the State of Louisiana Main Street Program. She explained that the City of DeRidder currently participates in the program and noted that when multiple member governments express interest in similar initiatives, the Southwest Louisiana Regional Planning Commission (SWLA-RPC) attempts to assign staff to assist with implementation so that funding opportunities can be pursued for as many interested communities as possible.

Mr. Hollier added that Mayor Mike Danahay of Sulphur had previously approached SWLA-RPC about creating a downtown development program. Josie White, a city employee, was assigned to begin the effort, and one of her first priorities was joining the state's Main Street Program. Mr. Hollier explained that after approximately six months, Ms. White accepted a position in Texas. As a result, he approached the state with the idea of allowing SWLA-RPC to employ a regional Main Street Coordinator who could serve multiple municipalities simultaneously. While the state initially responded that this was not how the program traditionally operated, Mr. Hollier encouraged officials to research whether similar models existed elsewhere rather than dismissing the concept outright.

Mr. Hollier explained that he and Ms. Gaines discussed surveying member governments to determine how many communities would be interested in participating before developing a regional program. Such an approach would allow municipalities to share a coordinator instead of each hiring a full-time employee.

Ms. Mary Kaye Eason asked how many employees SWLA-RPC currently has, to which Ms. Gaines responded that the agency currently employs 18 staff members.

Mr. Ben Boudreaux asked how annual salary increases are handled and whether they were incorporated into the proposed budget, to which Ms. Gaines explained that salary adjustments are included in the budget as presented. She further noted that if the agency receives several pending grant awards, additional staff will likely need to be hired to administer those programs.

Mayor Hal McMillin asked whether employee increases would consist of Cost of Living (CPI) adjustments or merit-based raises, to which Ms. Gaines explained that employees receive annual performance evaluations and raises are merit based.

Mayor McMillin stated that if employees receive raises, the Board should be informed regarding who receives them. He asked whether any staff members had recently received significant salary increases.

Ms. Gaines requested an Executive Session to discuss personnel matters rather than in an open meeting, noting that employees were participating in the meeting. She stated that discussing individual salaries and performance evaluations publicly would not be appropriate and would be unfair to staff members.

Mr. Ben Boudreaux suggested amending the budget approval so that employee raises would be submitted to the Board for approval.

Ms. Gaines explained that, under the executive director's contract, the Board has direct authority over the director. The Executive Director, in turn, has authority over employee salary adjustments.

Mr. Hollier added that the budget includes a lumpsum designated for salary adjustments. His typical practice is to review salary actions taken by major member governments, including the City of Lake Charles and Calcasieu Parish, and attempt to provide comparable cost-of-living increases as the agency's budget allows. Additional merit increases are then considered based on individual performance.

Mayor McMillin observed that, under the current budget structure, the Executive Director could theoretically award a significant raise without the Board being aware of it because the adjustment would be incorporated within the overall personnel budget. He expressed his desire for greater transparency regarding employee pay increases.

Mr. John Cardone, City Administrator for Lake Charles, asked a subsequent question about the proposed Main Street Coordinator position regarding the responsibilities such a position would perform for participating in communities.

Mr. Hollier explained that the position is intended to leverage limited regional resources. His goal is to gather interested communities together, identify shared needs, and determine how regional staffing resources could assist multiple jurisdictions, but participation requires extensive documentation, evaluating buildings, properties, downtown infrastructure, organizational development, and continual programming of community events. Municipalities must maintain compliance with both state and national Main Street requirements before becoming eligible to apply for certain grant opportunities, which may be upwards of $50,000.

Mayor Michael Harris stated that the City of DeRidder currently participates in the Main Street Program. While acknowledging that compliance requires substantial effort, he emphasized that the program opens the door to numerous grant opportunities and stated that he strongly supports participation. He asked for additional clarification regarding the duties of a regional Main Street Coordinator, specifically whether the role would focus primarily on compliance or maintaining ongoing program requirements.

Mr. Hollier explained that successful Main Street Programs rely heavily on volunteers and community engagement. Coordinators oversee documentation, event planning, organizational development, and numerous ongoing activities necessary to maintain compliance. He further noted that many Main Street Coordinators remain in their positions for only about two years, making continuity difficult. His objective is to provide stable, consistent regional support regardless of local staffing changes. He reiterated that the program requires significant effort but can achieve meaningful progress through organization and consistency.

Mr. Ben Boudreaux made A MOTION to amend the budget approval so that employee raises would be submitted to the Board before approval.

Ms. Mary Kaye Eason suggested establishing a subcommittee to review employee raises and report recommendations to the full Board, thereby avoiding discussion of individual salaries before the entire Board.

Ms. Jamie Gaines reminded the Board that any such process would first require a review and possible amendment of the agency's bylaws before a subcommittee could be formally established.

Mr. Jacob Dillehay suggested removing Item V referencing a graduated personnel evaluation increase in the proposed 2026-2027 budget totaling $50,000 to allow the overall resolution to be approved while postponing action on employee raises.

Mayor Hal McMillin reiterated that Board members should know who is receiving raises and that salary adjustments should distinguish between standard cost-of-living increases and merit-based increases. He emphasized the Board's responsibility to understand how budgeted funds are being allocated.

Mr. Dillehay proposed removing Item V from the budget, thereby temporarily pausing salary increases.

Ms. Gaines reminded the Board that annual employee evaluations occur based upon each employee's hire date and noted that several employees have anniversary dates in July and August. She expressed concern that delaying raises could affect those scheduled evaluations.

Mr. Dillehay asked whether the bylaws had always granted the Executive Director this authority, to which Ms. Gaines responded that she was uncertain.

Mr. Hollier stated that the bylaws had always been structured in that manner. He reiterated that his standard practice has been to monitor salary actions taken by major member governments and ensure SWLA-RPC employees receive comparable cost-of-living increases whenever financially feasible. Merit increases are then considered only for employees who consistently demonstrate strong productivity and performance. Mr. Hollier stated that he is not opposed to whatever direction the Board chooses but expressed concern about Board involvement in evaluating individual employees.

Ms. Gaines added that the approximately $50,000 budgeted for raises represents roughly four percent of the agency's overall budget.

Mr. John Cardone commented that he believed the Board's original intent was simply to authorize cost-of-living increases without becoming involved in individual salary decisions. However, he also believed that if Board members request information regarding salary adjustments, staff has an obligation to provide that information. He questioned whether a bylaw amendment would even be necessary simply to share salary information with Board members upon request.

Mr. Cardone further observed that many new Board members simply want to understand how personnel costs are being managed. He stated that providing the requested information may eliminate the need for a lengthy bylaw amendment process.

Mr. Hollier agreed with Mr. Cardone's comments and stated that he has no objection to having either the Board or Executive Committee review employee salary adjustments. He is committed to making that process available.

Mr. Ben Boudreaux asked whether Mr. Hollier would voluntarily provide that information regardless of the current bylaws.

Mr. Hollier responded with an unequivocal "yes."

Mr. Boudreaux stated that such action would improve transparency.

Mr. Hollier concluded by expressing hope that the Board would soon need to revisit the budget after pending grant awards are received. Those grants would significantly expand SWLA-RPC's activities with member governments, particularly regarding long-range planning, housing initiatives, adjudicated property efforts, and the proposed Land Bank. He noted that those initiatives may eventually require separate accounting structures, additional staffing, and possibly independent organizational structures as programs mature.

Mr. Hollier stated that he anticipates returning to the Board within approximately 60 to 90 days, or by the end of the summer, to amend the budget if necessary. He again reiterates that he has no objection to meeting with the Executive Committee on an ongoing basis regarding employee raises.

Ms. Gaines asked whether future salary information should be shared with the entire Board or only a designated committee.

Mayor McMillin responded that the process could be determined later and formally seconded Mr. Ben Boudreaux's motion to amend the budget by removing Item V.

Before concluding the discussion, Ms. Gaines informed the Board that Mr. Hollier had not requested a salary increase for himself during the previous three years.

VI. Resolution No. 2350 Approval and Authorizing the Southwest Louisiana Regional Planning Commission (SWLA-RPC) to apply for a Bridge Improvement Program (BIP) Grant through the U.S. Department of Transportation — Ms. Jamie Gaines, Assistant Director

Action requested.

Ms. Jamie Gaines stated that the grant application is for the proposed Fabacher Road overpass in Sulphur. She explained that the project will not only impact the City of Sulphur, but the anticipated expansion of the industrial park along Fabacher Road will require sewer and water service from the Town of Vinton.

A MOTION to approve Resolution No. 2350 Approval and Authorizing the Southwest Louisiana Regional Planning Commission (SWLA-RPC) to apply for a Bridge Improvement Program (BIP) Grant through the U.S. Department of Transportation, was made by Mayor Hal McMillin and seconded by Mr. Ben Boudreaux. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

VII. **Resolution No. 2351 Approval and Authorizing the Southwest Louisiana Regional Planning Commission (SWLA-RPC) to apply for a Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) Hazard Mitigation Grant through the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA)** — Ms. Jamie Gaines, Assistant Director

Action requested.

Ms. Jamie Gaines stated that this is a grant application for the Cameron Jack-Up Center that SWLA-RPC intends to submit to FEMA. She explained that staff has been working on the project for the past four years and has received confirmation from FEMA that it meets the agency's flood mitigation criteria. Ms. Gaines noted that this funding opportunity has only recently opened, so limited information is currently available. However, the project is already fully designed.

Ms. Gaines further explained that the project would provide an elevated platform capable of being raised above storm surge levels. The facility would include a doctor's office, a bank, and other amenities that are currently unavailable in Cameron. She further stated that the next phase of the project would include a jack-up structure containing an apartment complex. In the event of a hurricane, the structure could be elevated above anticipated floodwaters, and, once the water recedes, it could be lowered back to ground level.

A MOTION to approve Resolution No. 2351 Approval and Authorizing the Southwest Louisiana Regional Planning Commission (SWLA-RPC) to apply for a Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) Hazard Mitigation Grant through the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), was made by Ms. Kim Montie and seconded by Mayor Michael Harris. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

VIII. **Resolution No. 2352 of the Board of Directors of the Southwest Louisiana Regional Planning Commission (SWLA-RPC) for Louisiana Planning District 5 Approving And Adopting an Hourly Payable Rate for Fiscal Years 2026-2028.** — Mr. Mike Hollier, Executive Director

Action requested.

A motion to defer items VIII and IX was made by Mr. Ben Boudreaux and seconded by Ms. Katie Armentor. Hearing no objection, the MOTION carried.

IX. Resolution No. 2353 of the Board of Directors of the Southwest Louisiana Regional Planning Commission (SWLA-RPC) for Louisiana Planning District 5 Approving and Authorizing an Intergovernmental Joint Cooperative Endeavor Agreement with the Town of Oberlin, Louisiana for the Development of a Safe Streets for All Action Plan.
Action requested.

Ms. Jamie Gaines
Assistant Director

This item was deferred.

X. Incorporation of Land Bank of Southwest Louisiana Three fundamental purposes: adjudicated properties, transportation right-of-way, and watershed reservoirs.
Status Update.

Mr. Mike Hollier
Executive Director

Mr. Mike Hollier reported that SWLA-RPC recently consulted with legal counsel regarding the incorporation of the Land Bank of Southwest Louisiana, as previously approved by the board. He explained that several operational questions had been raised by Board members. According to Mr. Hollier, legal counsel addressed those questions to his satisfaction and provided an endorsement to move forward.

The next step, he explained, is determining how member governments will participate and how those efforts will be coordinated. Under the enabling legislation, multiple local jurisdictions may partner together to support the Southwest Louisiana Land Bank.

Mr. Hollier stated that the land bank will operate on two levels. First, each participating municipality or parish must adopt an ordinance establishing its own jurisdictional land bank. Second, the SWLA-RPC Board will serve as an umbrella organization through its incorporation of the regional land bank. The umbrella land bank will coordinate the activities of participating local jurisdictions.

Mr. Hollier explained that there is no cost for local governments to participate in the land bank. However, each participating jurisdiction must adopt a land bank ordinance. At this time, there are no financial obligations, enforcement provisions, or regulatory requirements associated with participation. He stated that SWLA-RPC hopes to begin implementation within the next 30 to 60 days and noted that several municipalities have already expressed interest. The first implementation is expected to begin with one municipality, followed by the City of Jennings, which will set the program in motion.

Mr. Hollier also informed the Board that he has been in contact with the author of the land bank legislation to discuss expanding the focus and purpose of the land bank. While he believes the land bank's primary purpose is to address housing needs, particularly through the management and redevelopment of adjudicated properties that affect communities throughout the region, he also views it as an opportunity to advance both short and long-term transportation planning and programming.

Additionally, Mr. Hollier stated that he believes the land bank can become an important tool in implementing the West Louisiana Watershed Region IV Plan, particularly as it relates to the proposed series of reservoirs. He reiterated that implementation is anticipated to begin in August; however, each local jurisdiction must first determine whether to participate by adopting the required ordinance.

Mayor Neal Watkins asked Mr. Hollier whether the City of Iowa could receive copies of the City of Jennings' land bank documents and proceedings to use as a reference when the City of Iowa joins the land bank.

Mr. Hollier responded that SWLA-RPC has asked its legal counsel to prepare a template ordinance that can be used by all participating local jurisdictions to establish their respective land banks. He explained that the goal is to develop a standard ordinance that can be distributed to all member governments and stated that it is expected to be available within the next 30 days.

Mayor Bonnie Jo Bahnsen asked how parish-level governmental entities would be approached or invited to participate in the land bank, to which Mr. Hollier explained that one of the land bank's primary objectives is to address adjudicated properties throughout the region, which remain the program's principal focus. He also noted that he had already presented the pilot program to the City of Jennings City Council, where numerous questions were asked regarding the program and its administration. Mr. Hollier concluded by stating that SWLA-RPC is prepared to make similar presentations to any parties interested in learning more about the land bank and its operation.

XI. Next Houma Field Trip on Residential Steel Construction to South Central Planning and Development Commission. Ms. Jamie Gaines, Assistant Director
Status update.

A motion to defer items XII through XIV was made by Mr. Ben Boudreaux and seconded by Mayor Hal McMillin. Hearing no objection, the MOTION carried.

XII. Adjudicated Property Pilot Program Status Mr. Mike Hollier, Executive Director
Information only. No action is requested.

This item was deferred.

XIII. SWLA-RPC Housing Initiative Update — Mr. Mike Hollier, Executive Director

For information only. No action is requested.

This item was deferred

XIV. SWLA Regional Mobility Authority — Mr. Mike Hollier, Executive Director

A. Rural Planning Organization (RPO)
B. SWLA Marion "Butch" Fox Rail Research Institute
C. Expediting implementation of transportation projects: DOTD/MPO/RMA/LOCALS
D. MPO Transportation Management Center (TMC)
E. Corridor Designations: Planning and Development
F. Securing Matching Funds: Pool Resource Development

This item was deferred.

XV. August Meeting Date and Time — Ms. Jamie Gaines, Assistant Director

To be determined.

XVI. Public Comment — Mr. Jacob Dillehay, Chair

Ms. Jamie Gaines reminded the board that this meeting would have been Mayor Mike Danahay's last before retiring, but he is out of town.

XVII. Adjournment — Mr. Jacob Dillehay, Chair

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

Jacob Dillehay, Chair

ATTEST: Michael Hollier

Michael Hollier, AICP, Director