

## **MINUTES**

### **MEETING OF THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**

12:00PM WEDNESDAY, December 11, 2024

HELD IN-PERSON AND VIA THE GLOBAL GOTOMEETING VIDEO CONFERENCE  
PLATFORM INITIATED AND CHAIRED FROM  
LRGVDC MAIN CAMPUS - 301 W. RAILROAD STREET, WESLACO, TEXAS  
BUILDING B, KEN JONES EXECUTIVE BOARD ROOM

**PRESIDING:** Mayor Norma Sepulveda

Mayor Norma Sepulveda called the meeting to order at 12:05 p.m. Roll Call was taken, and as of 12:07 pm quorum was attained.

**Present:** Mayor Norma Sepulveda

Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza, City of Mission  
Judge Aurelio Guerra, Willacy County  
Commissioner David Garza, Cameron County  
Commissioner Ellie Torres, Hidalgo County  
Mayor George Guadiana, City San Perlita  
Commissioner Edward Gonzales, City of Raymondville  
Mayor Rick Guerra, City of San Benito  
Veronica Gonzalez, UTRGV Edinburg  
Luke Lucio, TSTC  
Mr. Troy Allen, Delta Lake  
Mr. Jim Darling, Member at Large  
Mr. Tony Chavez, Member at Large  
Ms. Lupita Sanchez Martinez, Grassroots

**Absent :**

Mayor John Cowen, City of Brownsville  
Mayor Ramiro Garza, City of Edinburg  
Mayor Adrian Gonzalez City of Weslaco  
Mayor JR Garza, City of Alamo  
Mayor David Moreno, City of Donna  
Mayor Alma Salinas, Sullivan City  
Mayor Alejandro Flores, City of Los Fresnos  
Mayor Javier Villalobos, City of McAllen  
Mayor Ambrosio Hernandez City of Pharr  
Commissioner Marco Villegas, City of San Juan  
Paul Hernandez, South Texas College  
Ronald Mills, Willacy County Nav Dist.  
Ms. Ann Williams Cass, Member at Large

Without any questions from the board, Mayor Norma Sepulveda moved on to Item #2

Item #2: Consideration and ACTION to approve Meeting Minutes for December 11, 2024. **Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza made a motion to approve Meeting Minutes for December 11, 2024. Commissioner Edward Gonzales seconded the motion and upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.**

Item #3: Public Comment- No Public Comment

With no further comments and questions, Mayor Sepulveda moved on to Item #4.

Item #4: Administration

4A. Consideration and ACTION to approve social media Policy and Generative Artificial Intelligence. As the governing body of the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC), the Board of Directors is responsible for overseeing the general policies and programs of the organization. The LRGVDC's Personnel Policy Manual outlines a comprehensive set of policies that establish rules, guidelines, and standards for staff and representatives. In collaboration with the state, we have developed a specific policy related to social media and information technology. This item is being presented today for your consideration and approval. Jim Darling then asked if state wrote it or asked if we wrote the policy internally? Mr. Cruz then answered with, we collaborated with the Texas Association of Regional Councils (TARC), whose legal team initially drafted the policy. This draft was then reviewed and refined by our legal representative at Denton and Navarro. The policy has been thoroughly vetted through this process. **Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve social media Policy and Generative Artificial Intelligence. Mr. Troy Allen seconded the motion, upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.**

4B. Consideration and ACTION to approve Covered Application and Prohibited Technology Policy. Senate Bill 1893, passed during the 88th Legislative Session in 2022, is a law that prohibits the use of certain social media applications and services on state and local government devices. As you may be aware, platforms such as TikTok are included in these restrictions. While the bill was passed in 2022, its implementation was delayed until the Department of Information Resources (DIR) and the Department of Public Safety (DPS) could develop a model policy to address the prohibited applications. The law officially took effect on November 20th. **Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve Covered Application and Prohibited Technology Policy. Commissioner Edward Gonzales seconded the motion and upon a vote, the motion was carried unanimously.**

4C. Consideration and ACTION to approve Interlocal cooperation contract between the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley & the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council, relating to the use of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Regional Security Operations Center (RSOC) Services. In 2020, the Department of Information Resources (DIR) recommended the establishment of Regional Security Operations Centers (RSOCs) at universities across Texas. To date, two RSOCs have been created: one in San Angelo and a more recent one in Edinburg. On October 9th, we had the opportunity to meet with the staff of the UTRGV RSOC. The purpose of these centers is to assist local governments in addressing ongoing cybersecurity challenges. There is no cost associated with the RSOC's technical assistance, aside from any potential expenses for software or equipment needed for implementation at the Council of Governments (COG), which would be the only costs we would absorb. Jim Darling asked if they would have the right to request certain services if it would come out from Admin or Individual departments? Mr. Cruz responded, it would be through our office the main office, Admin and obviously for all programs within the LRGVDC. **Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve the Interlocal cooperation contract between the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley & the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council, relating to the use of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Regional Security Operations Center (RSOC) Services. Commissioner Edward Gonzales seconded the motion and upon a vote, the motion was carried unanimously.**

4D. Consideration of the date and time for the Annual Report, Budget Committee, and State of the COG. Javier Dominguez, Executive Analyst at LRGVDC, began by discussing the upcoming State of the Council of Governments (COG) event. He explained that, as Mr. Cruz mentioned, this is typical when the Annual Report meeting is held, usually during the second week of January. The Board typically approves the date and time in December. This year, however, the team is aiming to elevate the event and make it more impactful.

The Annual Report provides an opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments of LRGVDC's programs and discuss aspirations for the upcoming year, including goals for 2024, which will be featured in the 2025 Annual Report. Additionally, the budget will be presented as well, and, as Mr. Cruz noted, it will be recommended for approval to the General Membership and Board of Directors by the end of January.

This year, LRGVDC has been encouraged to increase visibility in the region. As part of this initiative, the event will recognize six regional planners for their dedication and hard work. These planners, who may work in various communities or agencies across the region, will be honored in front of the Board. Nominations for the award will be sent out, and feedback is welcome. This is the first time the event will include these recognitions, and the initiative is being funded through sponsorships.

The six planners will be selected from Hidalgo County (three), Cameron County (two), and Willacy County (one), with the aim of maintaining equitable representation across the region. In addition to presenting the Annual Report and the budget, LRGVDC will recognize these planners at the event.

The event is scheduled for Thursday, January 9th, from 11:30 AM to 1:30 PM, and will be held at the LRGVDC Ken Jones Executive Board Room. A different room configuration with round tables and tablecloths will be used to enhance the atmosphere. Lunch will be provided. The event has a seating capacity of 60, and the goal is to make this an annual event, potentially expanding its scope in the future.

There are four platinum sponsors for the event, and each sponsor is entitled to bring one guest. Board members and LRGVDC directors will also attend. The event is designed to foster a sense of community and recognition, with the hope of growing and improving in the years to come. Someone asked what kind of nominations would be needed. Javier then responds, typically, when we think of a "planner," we consider someone employed by a city or county. However, we recognize that this role can extend beyond traditional planners. For example, it could include individuals who manage programs at UTRGV or within a city, or even a city secretary who handles multiple responsibilities and works on community initiatives. Essentially, the term "planner" is being used in a broader sense to encompass anyone working for a city or county who contributes to the development and success of local initiatives.

With no further questions or comments, Mayor Norma Sepulveda then moved on to the next item on the agenda.

Executive Report: Mr. Cruz emphasized that he wanted to inform everyone that the 88th Legislative Session will begin on January 14th. As of now, over 1,500 bills have been filed. We are eager to monitor the progress and outcomes of these bills, as the session is expected to run through June. I will provide information on the bills as I receive it from TARC, including a list of bills, so you can stay informed about what is being discussed and approved throughout the session.

No questions or comments, Mayor Sepulveda then moved on to Item #5 Department Reports.

A. Community & Economic Development: Melisa Gonzalez started with her first actions items on the agenda for her department.

5.1. Consideration and ACTION to approve RGV Economic Development Advisory committee (RGV EDAC) Membership. One item would be the creation of a special EDO category for the Brownsville Community Improvement Corporation (BCIC), as well as the Institute of Higher Learning for Cameron County, Texas State Technical College. ***Jim Darling approved the RGV Economic Development Advisory Committee (RGV EDAC) Ron Garza seconded the motion and upon a vote, the motion was carried unanimously.***

5.2. Consideration and ACTION to approve Reappointment for odd Number Year Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC) Members. Melisa states that they were all approved on December 3<sup>rd</sup> at the SWAC meeting. ***Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve Reappointment for odd Number Year Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC) Members. Commissioner Edward Gonzalez seconded the motion upon a vote, the motion was carried unanimously.***

Status Reports: Mrs. Gonzales then wanted to let members know that the only other item I have pending is the development of our Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS). We are currently working on the draft which we expect to have ready for review by the EDAC in January. Our goal is to present it to the board in February, with the aim of submitting it to the EDA by March.

No further Questions or comments, Mayor Sepulveda then moved to Health & Human Services

B. Health & Human Services: Margarita Lopez had no Action Items on the Agenda. Ms. Lopez began with a brief report.

Status Reports: International **Recognition:** We received international recognition for our Care Transition Intervention Program. Our team successfully made 3,237 contacts within the six hospitals across the Valley, assisting individuals to ensure they have the necessary resources to avoid readmission within 30 days.

Veteran **and Caregiver Support:** We hosted impactful clinics for veterans, caregivers of individuals with disabilities, and caregivers for older adults.

Service **Expansion:** We expanded our services in Willacy County and enhanced our transportation services, addressing a significant challenge over the past few years.

Life **and Disability Conference:** We hosted our Life and Disability Conference and reached 56 outreach events.

Veterans **Festival:** Our third annual Veterans Festival was held on November 20th in Edinburg. A special thank you to Mayor Ramiro Garza for attending despite his packed schedule, and to Municipal Court Judge Eliazar Rodriguez, owner of La Palma Adult Daycare in Edinburg, for sponsoring the venue for this event.

Service **Milestones:** We support over 4,000 clients with health maintenance, homemaker services, and residential repairs.

Transportation **Services:** In partnership with sub-recipients, we provided 32,651 non-medical trips, exceeding our transportation goal by over 20,000 trips. We also provided 303 ADA-compliant home upgrades.

**Closing Remarks:** We appreciate your ongoing support, whether through approval or constructive feedback. Your suggestions encourage us to go the extra mile in addressing the needs of rural areas and ensure no community is overlooked.

No further questions or comments Mayor Norma Sepulveda moved on to Public Safety.

C. Public Safety: Criminal Justice & Homeland Security. Mr. Cesar Merla started off with Action Items on the Agenda. All Action Items would be approved after all action items were read out to board.

C.1. Consideration and Action to approve Resolution for FY 2025-26 Nonprofit Security Grant Funding. ***Jim Darling made a motion to approve the Resolution for FY 2025-26 Non-Profit Security Grant Funding. Troy Allen seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***

C.2. Consideration and Action to Approve Resolution for FY 2025-26 Homeland Security Grant Funding. ***Jim Darling made a motion to approve Resolution for FY 2025-26 Homeland Security Grant Funding. Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***

C.3. Consideration and Action to Approve Resolution for FY 2025-26 Coordinator for the Regional Fire Academy. ***Commissioner Edward Gonzales made a motion to approve Resolution for FY 2025-26 Coordinator for the Regional Fire Academy. Troy Allen seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***

C.4. Consideration and Action to Approve Appointment of Replacement Homeland Security Advisory Committee (HSAC) member Michael Silva. ***Jim Darling made a motion to approve Appointment of Replacement Homeland Security Advisory committee (HSAC) member Michael Silva. Commissioner Edward Gonzales seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***

Status Reports: Mr. Cesar Merla mentioned that his department report was attached but wanted to mention upcoming trainings that are available to the Region. They are as follows:

**Senior Officials Workshop:** A Senior Officials Workshop will be held on **February 20th, 2025**, from **9:00 AM to 3:00 PM**. The workshop will focus on an all-hazards approach and is designed for training purposes. If you or a new emergency manager are interested in attending, registration will open in January. The course is free of charge and will include breakout sessions. A summary of the course details is available.

**Narcan Training:** On **January 10th**, we will host a **Narcan Training** at the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council. The training will take place on a Friday, with several sessions available throughout the day. Narcan is a life-saving medication that provides responders with an additional 10 to 15 minutes to reach individuals in need, making this training crucial.

**Ready RGV Conference Update:** Our annual **Ready RGV Conference** has been rebranded to the **Listo RGV Conference**, now incorporating a local 956 flavor. The **second annual Listo RGV Conference** will take place **September 24th through 26th**. More time is available for planning, and a save-the-date flyer will be distributed. The conference will offer TECO and mental health credits and is open to all attendees.

**Homeland Security and Criminal Justice Grants:** The **FY 2025-2026 Homeland Security and Criminal Justice grants** will open on **December 16th** and close on **February 13th, 2025, at 5:00 PM**. A webinar will be held on **December 20th, from 10:00 to 11:30 AM** to provide more information about the grants. Further details will be shared as the week progresses.

No further questions or comments Mayor Norma Sepulveda moved on to LRGV Police Academy.

C.B. LRGV Police Academy: Mr. Javier Solis started off with his first Action Item on the Agenda.

C.B1. Consideration and Action to Approve an Interlocal Agreement for Cooperative Extension Services and LRGV Academy Site between the Lower Rio Grande Valley Academy and the Rio Grande City Police Department and with Authority for the LRGVDC Executive Director Manuel Cruz to sign and finalize the agreement. ***Commissioner Edward Gonzales made a motion to approve the Interlocal Agreement for Cooperative Extension Service and LRGV Academy site between the Lower Rio Grande Valley Academy and Rio Grande City Police Department and with Authority for the LRGVDC Executive Director Manuel Cruz to sign and finalize agreement. Troy Allen seconded the motion; and upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***

Status Reports: Mr. Solis explains a little on his action item. **Collaboration with Rio Grande Police Department:** We are entering into an interlocal agreement with the Rio Grande Police Department to extend our services and offer basic peace officer academies to the community in Starr County. Although Starr County is not part of our Council of Governments, the current situation requires individuals to travel to Laredo or the LL County Sheriff's Office for training. This partnership puts us in a unique position to assist our neighbors and provide valuable law enforcement career opportunities to the many young individuals in the community interested in pursuing a career in law enforcement. By entering into this agreement, we can make this training accessible to them. Mr. Solis then had some highlights he wanted to share with the board as well.

**Heroes in Action Veterans Marksmanship Competition:** Last month, we partnered with Health and Human Services from the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council to host our inaugural *Heroes in Action* veteran marksmanship competition. This event included firearm training and a friendly marksmanship competition in honor of Veterans Day. We were honored to have Mr. Cruz, a veteran, participate in the event, which was a great success.

**226th LRGV Mission Academy Graduation:** We also celebrated the graduation of the 226th LRGV Mission Academy class. Mayor Garza, thank you for the inspiring video message you sent, even though you could not attend in person. It was a meaningful gesture to the cadets. A total of 21 cadets graduated from the Mission Police Academy. Notably, this marks the first time in our partnership with Mission that we achieved a 100% pass rate in back-to-back academies, with all cadets passing the state licensing exam. **Academy Program Achievements:** Since taking over the program in January, we have improved the academy's GPA from 77% to 95%. Our contract with the State of Texas requires at least an 80% GPA, and we are proud to have exceeded that expectation. This year, we graduated from 80 out of 84 cadets, providing 80 new officers to the region. We are preparing for the next graduation in Edinburg, where we will graduate another 21 officers.

**Training Numbers for the Month: New Officers Added: 21. Total In-Service Courses Taught: 2. Total Officers Trained: 37. Total Contact Hours: 412 classroom hours. Officers Trained in Active Shooter Response: 22. Year-to-Date Training Overview: New Officers for the Region: 80. In-Service Courses Taught: 119. Total Officers Trained: 2,017. Total Contact Hours: 85,727 Officers Trained in Active Shooter Response: 459**

We are proud to have exceeded our expectations for the year and look forward to continuing our efforts in January. Our mission is to provide highly trained, highly qualified officers to the region, and we remain committed to that goal. **Active Shooter Training for Texas Peace Officers:** As a reminder, all Texas Certified Peace Officers, whether active, retired, or reserve, must complete 16 hours of active shooter training through ALERT every two years. If assistance is needed, please feel free to reach out.

No further questions or comments Mayor Norma Sepulveda moved on to Rio Grande Valley Emergency Communication District.

Status Reports: Mr. Dennis Moreno started off with no action items on Agenda but wanted to give an update on Departments reports.

**GS Team:** This year, our GS team has achieved significant milestones, creating over 2,750 tickets, with an average of approximately 300 tickets per month. In addition to their primary responsibilities, they have also taken on the important task of updating address points, with over 4,339 address points processed. In total, nearly 30,000 production tasks were completed this year. Their efforts have been crucial in keeping our 9-1-1 map up to date, ensuring accurate and reliable service for our residents. We recommend them for a job well done.

**IT Team:** Our IT team has successfully completed the 9-1-1 audits for this year, supporting approximately 434,000 9-1-1 calls across Hidalgo and Willacy Counties. This positions us to handle nearly half a million calls in 2025. The IT team has also maintained an impressive 99.9% call delivery rate, ensuring reliable and efficient service. Beyond call handling, they have played a key role in safeguarding our 9-1-1 system, implementing security measures to protect against potential threats from both domestic and foreign entities. Their dedication to community safety is truly commendable.

**Community Engagement Team:** Our Community Engagement team has had an outstanding year, participating in 22 National Night Out events and a total of 90 community events throughout the year. We would like to extend our gratitude to all the cities that provided invitations for these events. We are excited to carry this momentum into the next year and continue our strong community presence.

**Closing Remarks:** I want to thank all teams for their hard work and commitment throughout the year. Your efforts have significantly contributed to the success of our operations, and we look forward to continuing this positive momentum into the future.

No questions or comments, Mayor Sepulveda proceeded to Item D Valley Metro.

D. Transportation Valley Metro: Mr. Tom Logan started off with his action items on the agenda.

D.1. Consideration and Action to Approve revised LRGVDC Regional Transit Service Departments Americans with Disabilities Act “ADA” Policy and Procedures. The Valley Metro’s ADA policy and procedures are designed to ensure equal access and non-discriminatory services for individuals with disabilities across various sectors. As a requirement from our federal and state funding agencies, we are obligated to review and update this policy annually to ensure it remains compliant and effective. ***Jim Darling made a motion to approve revised LRGVDC Regional Transit Service Departments Americans with Disabilities Act “ADA” Policy and Procedures. Ernie Garcia seconded the motion upon a vote, motion was carried unanimously.***

D.2. Consideration and Action to Approve revised LRGVDC Regional Transit Service Departments Operations Policy and Procedure. We are currently in the process of updating our policy documents, including redlining to reflect changes in employee names, titles, and the organizational chart. Additionally, we are incorporating new appendices into the policy, which will cover topics such as non-revenue vehicle usage, Valley Metro building and bus camera access, child-free workplace policy, and blood-borne pathogens standard operating procedures. These updates will ensure our policies remain comprehensive and aligned with current practices. ***Jim Darling made a motion to approve revised LRGVDC Regional Transit Service Departments Operations Policy and Procedure. Commissioner Ellie Torres seconded the motion and upon a vote, the motion was carried unanimously.***

D.3. Consideration and Action to Approve revised LRGVDC Regional Transit Service Department Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan (PTASP). The Federal Transit Administration has introduced new requirements that we have incorporated into our plan to ensure compliance. During our upcoming tri-annual review, one of the key areas of focus will be the safety plan, as it is a new component of our program requirements. This ensures that we meet all necessary standards and regulations. ***Jim Darling made a motion to approve revised LRGVDC Regional transit Service Department Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan. (PTASP). Troy Allen seconded the motion; upon a vote, the motion was carried unanimously.***

Status Reports: **Program Report and Ridership:** Year-to-date ridership has surpassed 200,000, reflecting a 9% increase, indicating greater utilization of our services. We are also seeing a rise in the use of our automated pay system, with more passengers purchasing passes and using credit cards. We are pleased that riders are taking advantage of the new features in our farebox system.

**Right to Vote Initiative:** On August 28th, the Board approved the initiation of the Right to Vote program. Following this approval, staff quickly created a variety of public relations materials and social media content to promote the program. The initiative also received significant media coverage, including a full report on Channel 5, where they interviewed Manny. We also released two videos showcasing our buses with destination signs indicating "Free Rides for Voting." The program saw a total of 274 individuals utilizing free rides across all routes. Additionally, our social media efforts garnered over 1,000 views on the videos and messages shared. Although the program ran for just 12 days, its impact was significant across the five-county area.

**Acknowledgments:** We would like to extend our gratitude to the City of Brownsville and Mayor Cowen for being a platinum sponsor of the event. We also thank Voces Unidas and Ms. Lupita Sanchez, who served as a silver sponsor, as well as Frontier Science from Brownsville, who sponsored the posters and decals placed on the buses. A special thank you to Mr. Franco for his invaluable assistance in helping to fruition.

No further Questions or comments, Mayor Sepulveda then moved to Rio Grande Valley MPO.

Rio Grande Valley MPO: **MPO Long-Range Plan Development and Public Engagement:** I would like to remind everyone that the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is currently in the process of developing its long-range plan. In the fall of this year, we held five public engagement opportunities to involve the community. As we continue developing the plan, we are seeking opportunities to present to various bodies, including this board, to gather input and share progress.

One of our goals is to engage the public in non-traditional ways, such as participating in community events like farmers' markets, where we can directly interact with residents. This is important because many people may not fully understand what an MPO is or how the planning process works. After the policy board adopts the plan, there is often confusion about why certain projects are not included. Our aim is to improve transparency and communication throughout the process.

As we move forward, we will return to make a presentation outlining our public engagement schedule. We will also collaborate with Mr. Cruz and his staff on any other potential engagements. I am open to any questions, comments, or suggestions regarding public involvement opportunities.

With no further questions or comments Mayor Sepulveda moved on to Item #7



#7 New & Unfinished Business: **Closing Remarks and Appreciation:** Mr. Cruz ended the meeting with a few words. Before we conclude, I would like to sincerely thank the board for your leadership throughout the year. As echoed by the staff, we truly cannot do what we do without your support. I understand that each of you has a busy schedule in your respective cities, and it takes considerable effort to attend our monthly board meetings. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

For those who have not been able to attend, we will continue reaching out and exploring ways to encourage full attendance, perhaps even changing the lunch menu to make it more appealing. As we all know, the decisions we make here impact on the entire region. We are, at the end of the day, an extension of your cities and counties, and everything we do is for the benefit of the region and the citizens who rely on our services.

Again, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone for your continued participation, leadership, and support throughout the year.

There being no further business to come before the board, Mayor Sepulveda made a motion to adjourn at 12:46 PM



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President Mayor Norma Sepulveda

ATTEST:

  
Liza Alfaro, Recording Secretary

