

MINUTES

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

12:00 PM WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 31, 2022

HELD IN-PERSON AND VIA 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: PRESIDENT AMBROSIO "AMOS" HERNANDEZ

President Ambrosio "Amos" Hernandez called the meeting to order at 12:03 pm. Roll call was taken, and a quorum was declared.

President Hernandez took item 3. A. - Legislative Update from The Honorable Mayra Flores, Congressional District 34 out of order and recognized Congresswoman Flores. Ms. Flores introduced herself and thanked the Board and President Hernandez for the opportunity to speak today. She informed the Board about her achievements, about several issues she is working on such as the plight of farm workers, border issues, homeland security, and infrastructure improvements. At the conclusion of her update, Congresswoman Flores encouraged Board Members to contact her office with any concerns or issues she might be able to help with.

President Hernandez thanked Ms. Flores and opened the floor for questions. There being no questions from board members, the President broached the issue of how important border security is and urged Ms. Flores to fight to provide solutions to upgrade ports of entry along the entire southern border, from Brownsville, Texas to San Diego, California. President Hernandez stated that providing security on the southern border provides security for the entire USA, yet our region pays the bulk for this security with local taxpayer money. As such, the federal government should take that into consideration when they fund federal highways. Ms. Flores agrees and understands the issues we have at the southern border. President Hernandez brought up the struggle the Border Patrol has with employment. Currently many Border Patrol officers are being trained on the east coast and assigned to the RGV, an area and culture they are not familiar with. He stated that the training should be here and that there are many suitable candidates here, and when they complete their training, they are assigned elsewhere in areas they are unfamiliar with. Ms. Flores stated that they are aware of this issue and that it is something they are already working on.

Upon conclusion of questions and comments with Ms. Flores, President Hernandez moved to item #2: Consideration and Action to Approve Meeting Minutes (June 29, 2022). ***Mayor Oscar Montoya made a motion to approve the June 29, 2022, Meeting Minutes as presented. Judge Aurelio Guerra seconded the motion, and upon a vote the motion carried unanimously.***

Upon conclusion of action on the minutes, President Hernandez moved to Item 3: Public Comment and recognized Lieutenant Alvino Flores, Weslaco PD Criminal Investigations Division and Adjunct Instructor for the LRGVDC Regional Police Academy (RPA). Lieutenant Flores spoke in support of the LRGVDC RPA and stated that the negative actions of previous RPA staff should not affect the status of the RPA itself, especially when those actions have been properly addressed by the LRGVDC Executive Director.

Next, President Hernandez recognized Ms. Monica De La Cruz, Republican candidate for Texas Congressional District 15. Ms. De La Cruz informed the Board of the issues she plans to address should she be elected to congress.

Upon conclusion of public comments, President Hernandez moved to Item 4: Administration.

A. Ratification of Executive Committee Action on Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between LRGVDC, RGVMPPO & City of Brownsville and City of McAllen

Mr. Manuel Cruz, LRGVDC Executive Director, was recognized and informed the Board that the RGVMPPO Policy Board has approved this MOU, and they will provide planning funds from FY 2022-2023 UPWP to support the City of Brownsville and the City of McAllen in performing a Transit Plan Redesign. This would allow Brownsville and McAllen Metro to address changes in transit and transportation since the beginning of the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2020 and update the Transit Plans published in 2017 and 2019. This action item was presented to the LRGVDC Executive Committee due to LRGVDC's oversight in the Procurement review and approval process and because the LRGVDC Board of Directors were not scheduled to meet in July. ***Commissioner David Garza made a motion to ratify the Executive Committee Action on the MOU between LRGVDC, RGVMPPO & the City of Brownsville and the City of McAllen. Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza seconded the motion, and upon a vote the motion carried unanimously.***

B. Recognition and Gratitude for Weslaco FD and PD Service to LRGVDC

Mr. Cruz read an account of events that took place the afternoon of August 3, 2022. Around 3:30 pm, high winds tore loose a power line, and it landed on top of a palm tree along the railroad tracks behind our main campus catching the dried palm fronds on fire. The enflamed fronds fell to the ground causing a grass fire. More flaming embers were caught by the wind and blown to a second palm tree catching it on fire and causing another grass fire. 9-1-1 was called shortly after the fire was discovered and Weslaco PD and FD arrived quickly to put out the fires and ensure no new flames erupted. The second palm tree that caught fire was right next to Building B where the Ken Jones Executive Board Room and Small Board Room are located. The quick actions by Weslaco's finest ensured there was no damage to our structures; staff will be forever grateful.

C. Presentation on TxGLO's LRGV Economic Development Strategy and Diversification Study

Mr. David Moss, TxGLO Project Manager for the study introduced himself and thanked the Board for the opportunity to present an overview of the Economic Diversification Study that has been tailored for this region. He introduced Mr. Elijah Casas, TxGLO Intergovernmental Relations Representative who will be working directly on the project with their team. Mr. Moss stated that it is the mission of GLO's Community Development & Revitalization Planning Team to design and oversee planning studies, to collect, analyze, and communicate disaster related data to assist decision makers to better protect Texas from future disasters. He added that the GLO is aware that the Lower Rio Grande Valley has some of the state's most vulnerable populations, and as a direct result of the June 24, 2019, flood disaster, families in the region were either very slow to recover or have not recovered at all. Mr. Moss and staff are sensitive to making sure these voices are heard, which will be a part of their outreach efforts for this study. The intent of this study is to make it an actual decision-making tool, to accomplish this, the GLO partnered with AECOM. Mr. Moss then turned the floor over to AECOM Vice President, Mr. Chris Brewer.

Mr. Brewer acknowledged project partners Three Dimensional Development, Olivarri & Associates, and Asakura Robinson. He stated that from past experience, the team knows that in order to deliver a project like this they need to not only be on the ground in person, but also to collect a lot of data, and leverage what they know is ongoing research. Mr. Brewer stated that this will be a 15-month engagement and they are currently at the very starting point; he then stated the three project objectives, which are:

- To provide long-term recovery and economic revitalization strategies to help mitigate economic devastation from future major disasters.
- To understand the region's existing assets and market conditions to ultimately develop economic diversification strategies and an action plan specialized for the region.
- To join a statewide effort to store useful information for public use in future planning, disaster recovery, and community resiliency through the Texas Disaster Information System (TDIS) and

Community Health And Resource Management (CHARM).

Mr. Brewer then turned the floor over to Ms. Debbie Lindsey-Opel. Ms. Lindsey-Opel went over the project timeline and the public outreach phases and milestones. President Hernandez asked what this study will achieve and how it will help the region. Mr. Brewer stated that this study will do two things: 1) build engagement through outreach efforts, and 2) combine that with an intensive data driven approach to clarify how many businesses and homes have been impacted and what their needs are.

Ms. Veronica Gonzales asked if they were utilizing local resources that already exist. Mr. Brewer stated that their starting point is an engagement process that defines what those baseline resources are, and as the study progresses, they will help people align with both existing resources and new resources they will identify.

For the record, Commissioner David Garza asked for confirmation that this project is funded by HUD funds that came through the GLO. Mr. Casas confirmed that these are federal funds from the 2019 Disaster Recovery Funds. Upon conclusion of the presentation, Mr. Casas expressed the GLO's gratitude for the Board's continued support for their ongoing efforts in the community.

D. Presentation and Consider Action Regarding 2021 Annual Audit

Ms. Melissa Gonzalez, Oscar R. Gonzalez, CPA & Associates, was recognized and brought to the Board's attention the independent auditor's opinion at the top of page one of the audit. The opinion states that their firm audited the financial statements of the LRGVDC for the year ended December 31, 2021, and their opinion is that we do present fairly in all material respects the financial position of LRGVDC. There were no findings for the grant testing or at all on our financials. Ms. Gonzalez stated that LRGVDC has a very good accounting staff and that they, and Finance Director Crystal Balboa do a very good job especially considering that they handle \$27MM in both federal and state funds. ***Upon conclusion of the presentation of the audit, Mr. Troy Allen made a motion to accept the 2021 Annual Audit. Mayor Oscar Montoya seconded the motion, and upon a vote the motion carried unanimously.***

E. Presentation and Action to Accept Quarterly Investment Report

Ms. Crystal Balboa was recognized and presented the quarterly investment report. ***Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza made a motion to accept the quarterly investment report. Mr. Jim Darling seconded the motion, and upon a vote the motion carried unanimously.***

F. Consideration and Action to Approve Revisions to LRGVDC Personnel Policy Manual

Ms. Sarah Dierlam, LRGVDC Assistant Executive Director was recognized and informed the Board that the revisions to the LRGVDC Personnel Policy Manual are mostly housekeeping items as well as newly added policies such as: Telecommuting Policy and a new COBRA and HIPAA policies. ***Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza made a motion to approve the revisions to the LRGVDC Personnel Policy Manual as presented. Mayor Trey Mendez seconded.***

G. Consideration and Action to Approve Replacing BCycle Station

Mr. Cruz was recognized and informed the Board that on April 14, 2022, the new BCycle station located at the Hugh Ramsey Nature Park in Harlingen was destroyed as a result of a car accident. Staff has been working with the insurance company to replace the one (1) BCycle Station and three (3) bicycles. The entire cost of \$60,711.00 will be covered under our insurance at 100% with a \$250.00 deductible. Staff is working on replacing the station along with the 3 bicycles as soon as possible to continue providing this service to the community. ***Mayor Trey Mendez made a motion to approve replacing the BCycle station and bicycles as presented. Mayor Gus Olivarez seconded the motion and upon a vote, the motion carried unanimously.***

H. Executive Director Report

1. Introduction of New Staff Members

Mr. Cruz informed the Board that six (6) new staff members have recently joined the LRGVDC.

2. Transportation Staff Recognition for Years of Service

Ms. Dierlam was recognized and presented Transportation Department staff (Valley Metro and RGVMPPO) with service awards for completing 5, 10, and 15 years of service. As with last month's staff recognitions, most of these staff members completed their milestones in 2020 or 2021 and their presentations were delayed due to COVID-19 pandemic social distancing requirements. Special congratulations went to RGVMPPO Executive Director Andrew Canon for completing 15 years of service in 2020.

3. Update on Regional News, Funding Opportunities, Trainings, and Legislation

Mr. Cruz provided a list of topics of interest in the meeting packet.

Upon conclusion of the Executive Director Report, President Hernandez then moved to item 5: Department Reports.

A. Community & Economic Development

Mr. Rick Carrera Director of Community & Economic Development was recognized to address the following:

1. Consideration and Action to Approve Request to Amend 2021 Rio Grande Regional Water Plan

Mr. Carrera informed the Board that the Rio Grande Regional Water Planning Group (Region M) conducted a public hearing on August 23, 2022, to provide information on the amendment, which will add a Hidalgo County Drainage District #1 project to the 2021 Rio Grande Regional Water Plan. ***Mr. Jim Darling made a motion to approve the Request to amend the 2021 Rio Grande Regional Water Plan. Mayor Oscar Montoya seconded the motion, and upon a vote the motion carried unanimously.***

2. Consideration and Action to Approve Request to Establish Rio Grande Valley Economic Development Advisory Committee.

Mr. Carrera informed the Board that the Community & Economic Development staff have conducted several meetings with members of the Rio South Texas Economic Council (RSTEC). RSTEC is a group composed of several area Economic Development Organizations (EDO) and would serve as an advisory committee for the proposed Economic Development District within the LRGVDC. The idea is for the Rio Grande Valley Economic Development Advisory Committee (RGVEDAC) to be a platform for all the local economic development organizations and stakeholders to come together to share best practices and receive training. The RGVEDAC could be the next starting point for the next Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee which will be underway in the next six months. ***Mayor Oscar Montoya made a motion to approve the request to establish the Rio Grande Valley Economic Development Advisory Committee.***

Ms. Veronica Gonzales stated that it was her understanding that with RSTEC dissolving, it would be divided up to where the LRGVDC would have a role, as would the RGV Partnership and UTRGV. She asked if the proposed RGVEDAC would be under the CEDS model, for instance, where it would have transparency, all cities participate, all stakeholders participate, and they would develop a strategy that moves forward for economic development; it is not a whole new group that would normally convene as

previously under the CEDS. Mr. Carrera clarified that the CEDS Committee would encompass the proposed RGVEDAC as well as high education and industry partners. The RGVEDAC would be mostly and EDO focused group.

Ms. Gonzales expressed concern about the potential of creating a separate group that might replicate an existing group and possibly create conflict in the strategies that various groups develop. She stated that the purpose of CEDS, as stated in its statute is to make sure that there is representation from across the region in creating an economic development strategy. The idea was for the RGV Partnership to be the marketing arm; UTRGV to do the Building Blocks and data work; and have the LRGVDC convene a group that would then be the CEDS and set up the strategy for the Rio Grande Valley based on input from all the members of these groups.

Mr. Carrera informed the Board that the EDOs have approached the LRGVDC because they want to have Building Blocks, learning opportunities, and a place to convene that is strictly an EDO center group. He added that the RGVEDAC would be under the auspices of the LRGVDC and this Board of Directors who would thereby have final say on all recommendations they make, including their bylaws which have not yet been written.

Mr. Cruz commented that the CEDS has not had a formal committee structure, so formalizing the RGVEDAC would provide that structure under the LRGVDC; he reiterated that any recommendations the RGVEDAC makes would come before this Board for final approval. President Hernandez stated that he would like to see in writing how the proposed RGVEDAC would work. Mr. Cruz stated that the purpose of this action item is to create the committee. The next step would be to write the bylaws and present them before the Board for consideration and approval. Based on discussion, **Mayor Oscar Montoya modified his motion to approve the request to establish the Rio Grande Valley Economic Development Advisory Committee with the provision that all future moves from concept to setting up go through the LRGVDC Board of Directors. Mr. Troy Allen seconded, and upon a vote the motion carried with one vote against.**

Upon conclusion of action, Mr. Carrera noted that the status reports were in the meeting packet for review and pointed out that there has been a very slight increase in the reservoir levels, but despite the recent rains, the reservoirs are still extremely low, and we are still in a severe drought.

B. Health & Human Services.

Ms. Margarita Lopez, Director of Area Agency on Aging, was recognized to address the following:

Area Agency on Aging Program Action Items

1. Consideration and Action to Approve Contractors for Direct Purchase Services Pool

Ms. Lopez informed the Board that the Advisory Council recommends approval to add the contractors to the direct purchased services pool as recommended by the Advisory Council. **Mayor Oscar Montoya made a motion to approve adding the list of contractors to the Direct Purchase Services Pool as presented. Mayor Gus Olivarez seconded the motion, and upon a vote the motion carried unanimously.**

2. Consideration and Action to Approve Extending Current Direct Purchased Services (DPS) Contracts

Ms. Lopez stated that the Advisory Council recommends approval to extend the current DPS contracts for 90 days beginning October 1, 2022, through December 3, 2022. **Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza made a motion to approve extending the current Direct Purchased Services contracts for 90 days as recommended by the Advisory Council. Mayor Oscar Montoya seconded the motion, and upon a vote the motion carried unanimously.**

Program Status Reports

Upon conclusion of action, Ms. Lopez informed the Board that the status reports are in the meeting packet for review. Mr. Cruz acknowledged the efforts of the Area Agency on Aging staff to arrange for the RGV Veteran's Coalition to meet at the LRGVDC Ken Jones Executive Board Room for the foreseeable future.

C. Public Safety

Program Status Reports

The Criminal Justice & Homeland Security Program, Regional Police Academy, and Rio Grande Valley Emergency Communication District status reports were provided for review in the meeting packet.

D. Transportation

1. Consideration and Action to Approve Agency for Valley Metro Maintenance Plan

Ms. Maribel Contreras, Director of Valley Metro was recognized and informed the Board that staff requests approval to select Hendrickson Transportation Group, LLC (HTG) to develop the Valley Metro Maintenance Plan. This firm was selected through a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) process.

Ms. Contreras noted that only HTG answered the RFQ the first time it was released; so, it was released again in the hopes of receiving additional responses, but HTG was again, the only firm to respond. The project will be funded through FTA grant # TX-90-Y066-00 for a total cost of \$150,000.00 at a percentage of 80/20; \$130,000.00 will come from FTA funds and \$30,000.00 will come from local funds. **Mayor Trey Mendez made a motion to approve Hendrickson Transportation Group, LLC (HTG) to develop the Valley Metro Maintenance Plan. Judge Aurelio Guerra seconded the motion, and upon a vote the motion carried unanimously.**

2. Consideration and Action to Approve Updates to Valley Metro Transit Services Department Drug & Alcohol-Free Workplace Policy

Ms. Contreras stated that staff requests Board approval for minor revisions made to Valley Metro's LRGVDC Transit Services Department Drug & Alcohol-Free Workplace Policy as requested by TxDOT during the Drug and Alcohol Compliance Review held on July 6, 2022. The sections being revised are listed in the meeting packet and the full policy with changes noted in red is available for review on lrgvdc.org meetings page. **Mayor Gus Olivarez made a motion to approve the updates to the Valley Metro Transit Services Department Drug & Alcohol-Free Workplace Policy as presented. Mr. Troy Allen seconded the motion, and upon a vote the motion carried unanimously.**

3. Consideration and Action to Approve Updates to Valley Metro Title VI/Limited English Proficient (LEP)/Environmental Justice (EJ) Policy

Ms. Contreras stated that staff requests approval of the following updates to Valley Metro's LRGVDC Title VI/LEP/EJ Policy:

- Contact information for Director of Public Transit Systems
- LRGVDC and Valley Metro Logos
- LEP Program Statistics Information
- Valley Metro Systems Map

Mayor Oscar Montoya made a motion to approve the updates to Valley Metro Title VI/Limited English Proficient (LEP)/Environmental Justice (EJ) Policy as presented. Mr. Troy Allen seconded and upon a vote the motion carried unanimously.

4. Consideration and Action to Approve Updates to Valley Metro Public Transit Agency Safety Plan

Ms. Contreras stated that staff requests Board approval for the following updates to the Public Transit Agency Staff Plan:

- Compliance with all USDOT Regulations and Annual Review (673.11(a)).
- Ongoing commitment to fully implement a Safety Management System (SMS).
- Engage our agency employees in developing a robust safety culture.

Mayor Trey Mendez made a motion to approve the updates to Valley Metro Public Transit Agency Safety Plan as presented. Mayor Gus Olivarez seconded the motion, and upon a vote the motion carried unanimously.

Valley Metro Program Status Reports

Ms. Contreras provided the Valley Metro ridership update noting that in July Valley Metro provided 27,688 passenger trips which is a decrease in ridership of 8% from the previous month due to some colleges and universities being out for the summer. Regarding fare collection, since being implemented in April this year, \$238,553.49 in fares have been collected.

RGVMPO Status Report

The status report for the RGVMPO was provided in the meeting packet for review.

Item 6. – New or Unfinished Business

A. Discussion on Emergency Medical Service in the RGV

President Hernandez stated that it is common knowledge that the RGV has multiple hospitals and trauma centers, and he stated that a way to help out the system needs to be developed. RGV first responders are overwhelmed, many patients need to receive medical service outside of the RGV and require air transport. It is incumbent on RGV leadership to figure out a solution for the entire area to develop one standardized medical air lift service similar to the structure of a police department. We have an opportunity here at the LRGVDC to contact the State to help fund emergency medical transportation for the entire RGV. He wanted to make the Board aware of this issue and would like to talk further about it at a later date.

There being no further business to come before the Board, President Hernandez called for a motion to adjourn. **Mayor Trey Mendez made a motion for adjournment; Mayor Oscar Montoya seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 1:32 pm.**



Mayor Ambrosio "Amos" Hernandez, President

ATTEST:



Deborah Morales, Recording Secretary