

MINUTES

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

12:00 PM WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 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 12:05 pm. Roll call was taken, however, a quorum was not yet present. Staff was notified a quorum was en route and President Hernandez took item 6. – New and Unfinished Business out of order until they arrived. He next recognized U. S. Congressman Vicente Gonzalez who represents the 15th District of Texas and asked him to speak on legislative and district updates. Congressman Gonzalez stated they are wrapping up a productive congress that has passed and signed into law legislation that addresses some of the most pressing issues that impact South Texas. He stated that congress passed a bill that will bring prescription drug prices down, and they are also trying to lower inflation in the U.S. He stated that this July, President Biden signed into law the CHIPS and Science Act which provides \$52 billion in semiconductor manufacturing subsidies to incentivize companies to build, expand, or modernize domestic semiconductor facilities. It also has a 25% tax credit to encourage investments in semiconductor manufacturing. For military veterans, Congressman Gonzalez stated that congress recently passed an important law called Honoring Our Pact Act. It will expand access to Veterans Affairs (VA) health care services for veterans exposed to toxic substances during their military service. Another success that congress had recently is funding of over \$11.2 million for community projects across our district, and \$6.7 million came directly to the Rio Grande Valley. This funding is to improve drainage and water infrastructure. Congressman Gonzalez stated Congress passed a \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act; and \$3.4 billion of that will be coming to the Rio Grande Valley. It will be impactful in terms of expanding our bridges, drainage systems, roads, highways, and Wi-Fi accessibility. Over \$1.6 billion in projects were announced on the last Unified Transportation Program (UTP) for our region for many projects that are aimed at relieving congestion and accommodating regional growth. Congressman Gonzalez encouraged Valley leaders to have their project plans shovel ready for when the funding becomes available. If they do not have a plan ready to go, they will not be able to receive the funds for their projects.

Congressman Gonzalez next spoke about specific bills that he has filed including the Repatriate Our Patriots Act. He and Congressman Don Young have re-introduced the Repatriate Our Patriots Act to stop the deportation of immigrant veterans and allow veterans who have already been deported to return to the U. S.

Congressman Gonzalez informed the Board that he has negotiated with the President of Guatemala recently to create "Safe Zones" which will provide a safe and legal process for migrants to seek asylum. The Safe Zones Act is a critical piece of immigration legislation that addresses the safety of migrants and the security of the U. S. by offering a streamlined asylum process. This legislation seeks to allow migrants to seek asylum in designated Safe Zones located in their home countries. 80-90% of migrants come from three (3) countries: Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, and the idea is for all migrants traveling to the southern border of the U. S. to check in at that Safe Zone and start the immigration process at that point. This would take the pressure off U. S. southern borders, allow border patrol and law enforcement to do their jobs and it would take the cartel element out of it.

In conclusion Mr. Gonzalez stated that they have spread earmarks throughout District 15 including a hike and

bike trail in Elsa, and some funding for the fire department. He encouraged community leaders to bring their projects that are under \$1 million for consideration of funding and that if they are not funded during the first round, that new appropriations bills are coming.

Upon conclusion of Congressman Gonzalez' remarks, President Hernandez thanked him for coming and elaborating on these issues. President Hernandez emphasized the importance of low-cost prescriptions and is pleased congress is attacking this issue, not only for the RGV, but for the nation. He noted that this Board is very involved with economic development and emphasized the fact that the RGV needs good paying jobs across the region. Regarding infrastructure, President Hernandez expressed how important it was for the three separate Valley MPOs to unit to form the Rio Grande Valley MPO and the significant increase in funding this merger has brought. He emphasized the need for a second causeway to South Padre Island and to complete the I-69E project. President Hernandez stressed the importance of Valley counties and cities working together as opposed to individually. Congressman Gonzalez agreed whole-heartedly and stated that in Washington DC, the Rio Grande Valley is seen as one region as a whole, and not necessarily as individual cities and counties. In conclusion, Congressman Gonzalez stated that his door is always open, and he welcomes input from the Rio Grande Valley.

At 12:12 pm a quorum was attained, and President Hernandez moved to item #2: Consideration and Action to Approve Meeting Minutes (August 31, 2022). ***Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza made a motion to approve the August 31, 2022, Meeting Minutes as presented. Mayor Oscar Montoya 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 Mr. J. D. Key, District Director for Congresswoman Mayra Flores. Mr. Key introduced himself to the Board and informed them that a Military Academy Fair is scheduled in Brownsville this Saturday, October 1, from 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm. This event is for high school students who would like to attend West Point, the Naval Academy, or the Air Force Academy. Information on this event can be found on website flores.house.gov.

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

A. Presentation and Action to Approve Texas Gas Service Rio Grande Valley Energy Efficiency Program

President Hernandez recognized Ms. Naomi Perales, Texas Gas Service (TGS) Community Relations Manager for the Rio Grande Valley. Ms. Perales introduced Ms. Jasmine King-Bush, Energy Efficiency Programs Manager to give a brief presentation about the TGS Energy Efficiency Program. Ms. King-Bush gave a presentation that explained the four (4) programs under the RGV Energy Efficiency Program: Low-Income/Free Equipment, Residential New Construction, Commercial, and Residential Retrofit. She explained the three (3) ways to apply, the eligibility determinations and also the bill payment assistance TGS provides. The program runs on a 3-year cycle and the current cycle will conclude December 31, 2022. So, every three years they will come before the Board with a proposed budget for the next cycle's program plan. She explained that the program is funded by customers with a monthly contribution on each bill, and that there are no plans to increase contribution amounts for the next cycle. They do recommend moving funds earmarked for the residential retrofit and the residential new construction program to the low-income program. This decision is driven by the fact that there has been a need to increase funding for the low-income program. TGS staff is scheduled to file by October 15, 2022, and because there will be no budget increase for the coming cycle, no action is needed.

B. Executive Director Report

1. Introduction of New Staff Members

Mr. Cruz informed the Board that due to a full agenda in August, new staff members were not announced at that meeting, therefore he will include them in today's report. In August we welcomed

Ms. Liza Alfaro, Receptionist with the Administration Department, Mr. Jacob Salinas, GIS Program Specialist with the RGVECD, Mr. Humberto Guajardo, Vehicle Driver with Valley Metro, and Ms. Jessica Martinez, Research & Statistic Technician with the Homeland Security/Criminal Justice Programs. This month we welcomed Mr. Luis Avila, Mr. Eduardo Lopez, and Mr. Silvestre Mendoza to Valley Metro as Motor Vehicle Technicians.

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

Mr. Cruz provided a list of topics of interest in the meeting packet including a reminder about the Tx GLO-CDBG-MIT local mitigation plans program. The GLO has launched its Resilient Communities Program and has allocated \$100 million for CDBG-MIT funds for the development, adoption, and implementation of modern and resilient building codes and flood damage prevention ordinances to ensure that structures built within a community can withstand future hazards.

The GLO has allocated \$25 million in CDBG-MIT Local Hazard Mitigation Plans Program for updating local hazard mitigation plans or to provide cost share for hazard mitigation planning activities funded through other federal sources. Mr. Cruz provided updates on the Texas Broadband Development Program and also informed the Board that in September, the Texas Universal Service Fund Surcharge will increase from 3.3% to 24% for a limited time. The Texas Public Utility Commission voted to implement that increase last month.

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

A. Community & Economic Development

Program Status Reports

Mr. Rick Carrera, Director of Community & Economic Development was recognized and noted that his full status report is included in the meeting packet for review. He highlighted the following: status reports on the UTRGV Tx-STARS Roundtable Discussion – Technology for Disaster Resilience. He announced that the Regional Water Resource Advisory Committee has a vacancy in the higher education category, and that Region M has a meeting scheduled for tomorrow, September 29 at 9:30 am. Mr. Carrera gave the reservoir level report provided by TCEQ. He also reported on the new CHIP Act funding noting that it may be designed to go to underserved areas. He is hopeful that South Texas will be considered; however, on a national level, the underserved areas may be those that were one-time manufacturing hubs such as Ohio or Pennsylvania. He cautioned that the CHIP Act is still in its infancy, and we will need to wait and see what funding opportunities will be rolled out. He encouraged community leaders to start planning how they can be competitive for this funding.

B. Health & Human Services.

Program Status Reports

Ms. Margarita Lopez, Director of Area Agency on Aging, was recognized and informed the Board that the status reports are in the meeting packet for review. She highlighted the progress made in securing contractors for direct services and informed the Board about projects that have been completed. She announced that open enrollment for Medicare Part D begins October 15 and will go through December 7. She highlighted the Ombudsman Program, and the 1st Annual Vet Fest scheduled for Wednesday, November 16, 2022. This event will be a resource fair for veterans and military families and will offer health screenings, COVID-19 vaccinations, and booster shots.

C. Public Safety

Program Status Reports

Mr. Rene Perez, Program Supervisor for the Criminal Justice & Homeland Security Program gave a brief update that focused on the Computerized Criminal History requirements for each county and how important complete and accurate reporting is because it directly relates to potentially receiving grant funds. The complete report is available in the meeting packet for review.

Mr. Dennis Moreno, RGV9-1-1 Assistant Director highlighted the District's first anniversary celebration and announced that their GIS division has achieved 100% geofencing, and the events that their Public Education Department have attended.

Mr. Cruz added that RGV9-1-1 was contacted by and is currently engaged with Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) who asked for RGV9-1-1's assistance to coordinate with their Missing Migrant Program. The purpose of this program is to identify migrants that cross the border and wind up in the north-west; it is designed to mitigate the high number of migrant deaths. RGV9-1-1 will be assisting CBP to identify potential resources which may include providing them with data after CBP purchases their own equipment for their secondary PSAP. When a migrant in distress calls 9-1-1, police departments will have access to the caller's number, location, etc. This type of service currently exists in the form of a transfer button, which does not provide motor patrol the ability to see locations or GPS information.

D. Transportation

Valley Metro Action Item

1. Consideration and Action to Approve Procurement of Support Vehicles for Valley Metro

Ms. Sarah Dierlam, Assistant Executive Director was recognized and informed the Board that the requested support vehicles will be incorporated into the Valley Metro Fleet as replacements for vehicles that have met their useful vehicle life expectancy. Purchase of these vehicles will be made with 1005 FTA federal funding and TxDOT Transportation Development Credits. ***Mayor Oscar Montoya made a motion to approve the purchase of support vehicles for Valley Metro as presented. Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza seconded the motion, and upon a vote the motion carried unanimously.***

Valley Metro Program Status Reports

Mr. Cruz noted that the Valley Metro Status Reports were provided in the meeting packet.

RGVMPO Status Report

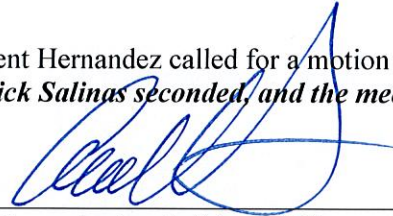
Ms. Eva Garcia, RGVMPO Bike-Ped Program Coordinator was recognized and gave a brief presentation on the RGVMPO Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside Program (TASA). The presentation covered various trails, monthly traffic statistics for the trails, and funding status. Ms. Garcia also informed the Board that the TASA Program has several projects that amount to a total of \$4.5 million in federal funding. These funds must be obligated by next August, and there are some really great projects, and staff have been working with them all year to make sure these projects get funded and developed quickly enough to obligate those funds, and they have also been working with some newer projects. Last year the TASA was awarded about \$3 million in federal funds for six (6) projects, two (2) have executed their advanced funding agreements. Even though these funds were awarded a year ago, they have not yet executed their advance funding agreements. Ms. Garcia brought that up because next year there will be \$11 million coming for FY 2023-2024 TASA projects. Staff will be an opening a call for projects next year with a minimum of 10% for planning projects, which is still

\$1.1 million. Ms. Garcia emphasized that the shovel readiness that Congressman Gonzalez touched on and the need to have your work done.

Item 6. – New or Unfinished Business

New business was heard at the top of the agenda

There being no further business to come before the Board, President Hernandez called for a motion to adjourn. ***Mayor David Suarez made a motion for adjournment; Mayor Rick Salinas seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 1:20 pm.***



Mayor Ambrosio "Amos" Hernandez, President

ATTEST:



Deborah Morales, Recording Secretary