

MINUTES

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

12:00PM Wednesday March 26, 2025

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 12:14 p.m. Roll Call was taken, and as of 12:16 pm quorum was attained.

Present: Mayor Norma Sepulveda

Commissioner Ernie Garcia, Willacy County
Commissioner Pete Garcia, City of Weslaco
Commissioner Joey Lopez, Cameron County
Commissioner Ellie Torres, Hidalgo County
Mayor Alma Salinas, Sullivan City
Mayor George Guadiana, City San Perlita
Commissioner Edward Gonzales, City of Raymondville
Mayor Rick Guerra, City of San Benito
Mr. Ron Garza, UTRGV Edinburg
Mr. Luke Lucio, TSTC
Mr. Troy Allen, Delta Lake ID
Mr. Ron Mills, Willacy Co. Nav. Dist.
Mr. Jim Darling, Member at Large
Mr. Tony Chavez, Member at Large
Ms. Lupita Sanchez Martinez, Grassroots Org

Absent :

Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza, City of Mission
Mayor John Cowen, City of Brownsville
Mayor Ramiro Garza, City of Edinburg
Mayor JR Garza, City of Alamo
Mayor David Moreno, City of Donna
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
Mr. Paul Hernandez, South Texas College
Mrs. Ann Williams Cass, Member-at-Large

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

Item #2: 1. Consideration and ACTION to approve Board of Directors Meeting Minutes for February 26, 2025. **Mayor Alma Salinas made a motion to approve Meeting Minutes for February 26, 2025. Ms. Lupita Sanchez seconded the motion and upon a vote; the motion was carried unanimously.**

Item #3: Public Comment- No Public Comment currently.

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

Item #4: Administration

Mr. Cruz began by stating, "Yes, ma'am, for consideration is the ratification of the Executive Committee's action on the following item: approval of the Homeland Security Roger Committee's prioritization list and resolution for the FY 2025-26 Homeland Security Grant Division regional grant application. Due to the tight deadline set by the state, we had to convene the Executive Committee. We received confirmation on March 14th that HSAC had met, and by the week of March 17th, the Executive Committee had unanimously approved the FY 2025-26 prioritization list as presented by HSAC. Following that, staff submitted and uploaded the list to the state grant management system, meeting the deadline of March 19th. We are now asking the committee to approve the action previously taken by the Executive Committee. I will entertain a motion.

4A. Consideration Ratification of Executive Committee Action on the following.

4.A.1. Consideration and Action to Approve Homeland Security Advisory Committee (HSAC) Prioritized Lists and resolution for FY 2025-26 Homeland Security Grants Division Regional Grant Applications. **Commissioner Pete Garcia made a motion to Approve Homeland Security Advisory Committee (HSAC) Prioritized Lists and Resolution for FY 2025-26 Homeland Security Grants Division Regional Grant Applications. Jim Darling seconded the motion and upon a vote; the motion was carried unanimously.**

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

Executive Report: Mr. Cruz Started off by introducing and welcoming Commissioner Lopez that took Commissioner Garza spot & for his first time attending the meeting. Mr. Cruz then moved on to introduce all LRGVDC New Hires.

Item 2: Updates on Regional News, Funding Opportunities, Training, and Legislative Items

The report was provided in advance for review. As stated in the report, this legislative session has seen an overwhelming number of bills, breaking records. This report is about a week and a half old, and since then, many bills have already been assigned to various committees. Some of the key bills that may positively impact the State of Texas, and the Council of Governments include:

House Bill 13: This bill creates the Texas Interoperable Council, which will focus on addressing interoperable communication and the development of statewide strategic plans for governing the interoperability of emergency communication equipment and infrastructure across Texas.

House Bill 150: Establishes the Texas Cyber Command, in response to the increasing number of cyber-attacks, such as phishing emails and other security threats. Our office has taken numerous actions to address these issues, and we have a partnership with the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) cybersecurity department to assist with any cybersecurity matters. Cities and counties are encouraged to reach out for support and resources from local and state agencies.

Senate Bill 2860: This bill relates to the emergency service fee collected by wireless service providers. It is another attempt by the Texas 9-1-1 Alliance to increase the 50-cent fee for 9-1-1 services, especially given the rise of digital 9-1-1 services and the associated costs. Although the bill has not been assigned to a committee yet, there is optimism for its passage.

Senate Bill 480: This bill authorizes local government entities to participate in water planning and funding activities, which includes regional councils of government and political subdivisions of the state.

Senate Concurrent Resolution 13: This resolution addresses the 1944 Water Treaty with Mexico and urges the federal government to push Mexico to deliver its fair share of water. The estimated loss to South Texas is \$993 million per year. This resolution is largely symbolic but highlights ongoing efforts to resolve water-related issues.

House Concurrent Resolution 101: A humorous but noteworthy resolution aimed at changing the New York State "strip" to a "Texas strip." It provides a light-hearted addition to the legislative session.

Regarding funding opportunities:

The **Regional Mitigation Program**, in partnership with the General Land Office (GLO), has announced approximately \$97.6 million for approved regional mitigation projects. Counties or cities must have an approved mitigation action plan to be eligible for hazard mitigation grant funds under the GLO.

The **Southwest Border Regional Commission** has made approximately \$11.3 million available. This funding supports infrastructure, workforce development, business entrepreneurship, and community development. Further details on eligibility and investment areas are provided in the report.

Mr. Jim Darling then asked; All the EPA staff have been let go, and I'm not sure how we can move forward with these projects when the entities that usually handle them have been significantly reduced. Have you received any updates on this situation? Mr. Cruz then answers, no, we're still waiting for further guidance. As you know, most of our funding comes from federal and state sources, with some state funds that are passed through by the federal government. To date, this situation hasn't impacted us. We haven't received any updates yet, particularly from the Economic Development Administration (EDA). They're still awaiting further guidance, especially on the topic of DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion), which is still part of the EDA's focus until further guidance is provided by EDA. We're waiting for more information, particularly regarding the Border 2025 project, and whether it will move forward. There was supposed to be a meeting last Friday.

Mr. Jim Darling then added that the people conducting the meeting had been replaced or let go from their positions.

Mr. Cruz responded, "I believe TCEQ conducts those meetings, so we haven't received any updates from them either."

Commissioner Pete Garcia then asked if the LRGVDC had its own grant writer.

Mr. Cruz replied, "Typically, the program directors who head the departments also handle the grant writing process for their programs. The only department that assists cities with not necessarily grant writing, but technical assistance is our Economic Development department, led by Melissa and her team of three. While we don't have an internal grant writer, we do help in identifying and disseminating grants. Most of our grants are recurring with annual allocations. We make sure that grant opportunities are communicated to the relevant departments, like law enforcement, fire, and EMS. I also forward information to the board of directors whenever funding opportunities arise.

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

Item #5: A. Community & Economic Development: Melisa Gonzalez had 2 Action items on the agenda for her department.

1. Consideration and Action to Approve resolution 2025-01 Proclaiming April as National Fair Housing Month and Supporting the Awareness of Fair Housing. **Mr. Troy Allen made a motion to Approve Resolution 2025-01 Proclaiming April as National Fair Housing Month and Supporting the Awareness of Fair Housing. Commissioner Ellie Torres seconded the motion, upon a vote; the motion was carried out unanimously.**

Yesterday, my Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC) approved the CEDS plans, with two key additions. First, we decided to include additional letters to our objectives, and second, we added a section on foreign trade information. The difference between the version you received and the one we're asking you to approve is that the updated version includes objectives labeled A, B, and C, along with a page dedicated to foreign trade details.

Mr. Cruz has already circulated some information about this, but what I need from you today is approval of these changes and the plan. Once approved, we'll submit the plan to the EDA. After they review and approve it, we can officially promote it to the region.

Regarding DEI, Mr. Cruz mentioned it earlier, but we haven't received any official guidance from the EDA on that matter. We're anticipating that if they're not satisfied with the wording related to DEI, they will send the plan back for revisions. As of now, we're following the previous guidance from EDA, which advised us to remove any DEI language. I'm optimistic that the plan will be approved, but if it's not, I will return to the EDAC, update the wording, and bring it back to the board for approval, along with any changes required by the EDA

2. Consideration and Action to Approve the LRGVDC Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). **Jim Darling made a motion to approve the LRGVDC Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) . Ron Mills seconded the motion upon a vote; the motion was carried unanimously.**

Mr. Cruz then reminded everyone that this initiative falls under the Economic Development Administration (EDA). He noted that when opportunities arise, we make sure to disseminate the information, with Melissa and her team providing technical assistance. He emphasized that this plan will be a valuable tool because any application submitted to the EDA must reference the goals and objectives it's targeting. If the application includes these goals, it will carry more weight, and attaching a letter of support from our organization will further strengthen it.

Status Reports: Mrs. Gonzales shared a few announcements. Tomorrow, we will be hosting STC4, our Clean Cities Apprenticeship Coalition workshop, from 10 AM onward. During this meeting, we'll be working with our members to finalize their bylaws, membership structure, and meeting schedules. Once that's complete, I'll bring it to the board for final approval.

Lastly, Mrs. Gonzales announced that our tire recycling event, "Road to Recycling," is scheduled for Wednesday, April 23rd. We're trying a Wednesday this time to see how successful it is. Currently, 31 entities are registered for the event, and we hope to have the locations for these entities posted on our website by Monday.

No further questions or comments, Mayor Norma Sepulveda moved on to B Health and Human Services.

B. Health & Human Services: Margarita Lopez had 2 Action Items on the agenda.

Ms. Margarita Lopez started off with, in accordance with the AAA LRGVDC direct purchase of service contractor application for fiscal year 2025, any requests for rate changes were required to be submitted by February 28th. We have received several rate change requests, and as per the timeline, these changes must be presented to you today. If approved, they will take effect on April 1st.

1. Consideration and Action to Approve Vendor Arise Home Health Care, Inc request for Amend contract rates from \$12.59 to \$15.59 an hour. ***Ron Mills made a motion to approve Vendor Arise home Health Care, Inc request to Amend contract rates from \$12.59 to \$15.59 an hour. Commissioner Ellie Torres seconded the motion, upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***
2. Consideration and Action to approve Vendor A Healing Touch Home Health request to Amend Contract Rates. The agency proposes adjusting the homemaker service rate from \$17.50-\$15.00 and the Caregiver respite rate from \$18.50 to \$15.00. ***Ron Mills made a motion to approve the Vendor, A Healing Touch Home Health request to Amend contract Rates. The agency proposes adjusting the homemaker service from \$17.50 to \$15.00 and caregiver respite from \$18.50 to \$15.00. Commissioner Ellie Torres seconded the motion, upon a vote; the motion was carried unanimously.***

Status Reports: Ms. Margarita Lopez mentioned that if there were any questions her report was attached to the packet provided.

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

C. Public Safety: Criminal Justice & Homeland Security. Mr. Cesar Merla was recognized and mentioned that he had 1 action item on the agenda.

C1. Consideration and Action to approve the appointed Frank Garcia, Criminal Justice Advisory Committee (CJAC) Member. ***Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve the Appointed Frank Garcia Criminal Justice Committee (CJAC) Member. Commissioner Ernie Garcia seconded the motion, upon a vote; the motion was carried unanimously.***

Mr. Merla mentioned that Frank Garcia is now replacing Dr. Benjamin Clinton, who previously held a position with Raymondville ISD in Willacy County, After Dr. Clinton moved to Mercedes, the committee's sole recommendation and the only candidate they saw fit for the role was Mr. Frank Garcia.

Status Reports: Mr. Cesar Merla started with; my report is attached for your review. I would like to briefly highlight a point Mr. Cruz raised about cybersecurity. Recently, we held a Cyber Disruption Workshop at the end of February, and it was very informative. We received the preliminary reports just yesterday. My team and I will be working closely with RSOC (UTRGV) and DIR to enhance cybersecurity efforts in the region. Several entities, including municipalities and a major hospital, have been affected. A key takeaway is that often, cybersecurity issues are caused by the actions of individuals behind the computer, not the technology itself. Please share this with your jurisdictions to help raise awareness.

THIRA Report: Our THIRA (Threat Hazard Identification Risk Assessment) received a perfect score of 47 out of 47 points, the first time since its implementation. If you would like a copy for your review or for any pending considerations, please contact Mr. Cruz or me, and we will share it with you. This achievement reflects our region's growing importance both within the state and nationally.

Clarification of Acronym: Mr. Merla clarified that THIRA stands for Threat Hazard Identification Risk Assessment, which identifies major threats, including cybersecurity. The report also includes the Stakeholder Preparedness Report (SPR) and the Implementation Plan (IP). These documents are required

for any jurisdiction applying for Homeland Security funding. If you need a copy to review, please let us know.

Training Opportunity: We are hosting a collaboration with TEEEX for a Basic Criminal Investigation Course at our Raleigh Metro location from April 21st to 25th. This one-week training course will be beneficial for those interested in criminal investigation.

Listo RGV Conference: Don't forget to save the date for the upcoming Listo RGV conference. The list of speakers is complete, focusing on mental health and emergency response. The early registration fee is still \$75, but it will increase to \$100 after April 18th, so please reserve your spot soon. The conference will once again be held at Margaritaville Hotel in South Padre Island.

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

C.2 LRGV Police Academy: Mr. Javier Solis had an Action Item on the Agenda.

1. Consideration and Action to approve the Utilization of LRGV Academy GPI funds in the amount of \$54,858.00 for the purpose of a 2025 Chevrolet Silverado. ***Ron Mills made a motion to approve the Utilization of LRGV Academy GPI funds in the amount of \$54,858.00 for the purpose of a 2025 Chevrolet Silverado. Mayor Alma Salinas seconded the motion, upon a vote; the motion was carried unanimously.***

Mr. Solis mentioned that the Academy requires the replacement of aging vehicles in our police driving fleet, which is essential for the Basic Peace Officer Course curriculum. The purchase of this new vehicle would serve a dual purpose: it would help supplement our current fleet, providing the necessary vehicles for training, and it would also be used to transport heavy equipment between sites. Currently, we lack a vehicle capable of managing this task. We respectfully request your consideration and approval of the GPI funds to support this purchase.

Status Reports: We offered a total of six in-service courses and trained 66 officers during the month. The total contact hours for February were 2,124. I also have a training announcement: From April 21st to 24th, we will be hosting Crisis Intervention Training at the Center for Education and Economic Development in the City of Mission. This training is designed to equip Valley law enforcement officers with the necessary skills to effectively respond to, recognize, and manage incidents involving individuals in mental crisis. The training is open to all law enforcement agencies in the Rio Grande Valley, and we are currently accepting registrations. If anyone is interested, please feel free to sign up.

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

Status Reports: Mr. Dennis Moreno started off with no action items on Agenda. Mr. Moreno also stated that Department status reports were attached to the packet provided. We cover a variety of areas, including GIS, IT, and the infrastructure for 911 call routing, as well as our public community engagement division. I want to draw your attention to a flyer I have here, which is also displayed on your screen. It's titled *Save the Date*, and it's for our third annual wellness seminar, scheduled for Tuesday, September 30th, 2025. Last year, we had around 400 attendees, and this event is free of charge. It's open to all public safety personnel, as well as yourselves, and will offer a full day of activities for our first responders. Please mark your calendars!

Additionally, I'd like to highlight that National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week will take place from April 14th to April 20th. This week is dedicated to honoring our 911 telecommunicators, who are essential first responders. They play a critical role by providing vital information to ensure an effective emergency response. We'll be recognizing their hard work and dedication throughout that week. These are two important events coming up, and one is specifically for your personnel, so please take a moment to acknowledge their vital contributions to public safety.

Mr. Cruz then wanted to mention that there was another conference coming up, the Texas NENA Public Safety Conference, which will be held from April 2nd to April 5th. This conference focuses on telecommunicators and public safety, and it will take place at the McAllen Convention Center. This is the first time the event is being held in South Texas. It's a statewide conference, so it's an excellent opportunity for networking and learning across Texas.

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

D. Transportation Valley Metro: Mr. Tom states that today he will have 2 action items on the agenda.

D.1. Consideration and Action on approval of resolution #2025-03, authorizing the acceptance of MCI Coach Busses to be transferred from Green Mountain Transit to Valley Metro. **Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve Resolution #2025-03, authorizing the acceptance of MCI Coach Buses to be transferred from Green Mountain Transit to Valley Metro. Ron Mill seconded the motion, upon a vote; the motion was carried unanimously.**

Mr. Tom Logan then mentioned that this resolution is a formal request, in line with FTA policies and procedures, to transfer seven MCI coaches from GMT to LRGBDC Valley Metro. These coaches are no longer needed by GMT due to changes in post-COVID travel demand, which have significantly reduced commuter ridership on their system. We plan to use these buses for our express routes connecting Brownsville, Harlingen, McAllen, and Edinburg. Additionally, they will serve as part of our contingency fleet for mass evacuations, special events, and the upcoming football season, which is expected to bring large crowds to various events and festivals. For example, this past weekend at the Onion Fest in Weslaco, we successfully transported nearly 2,000 people between the park-and-ride locations and the venue, and both attendees and the city were very pleased with our service. The only costs involved will be transportation fees and the expenses related to inspecting and preparing the buses for use.

Mr. Cruz then added that Compared to the current prices of new buses, these are a bargain buses with a remaining long lifespan. They are barely broken in, with around 200,000 miles on them, whereas new buses can cost anywhere from five hundred thousand to over a million dollars. Then mentions that regarding the football season, we've already had discussions with UTRGV, as they are expecting many attendees, over 20,000 particularly for their first football game and can only accommodate 2000 parking spaces. We hope to have these buses ready, or if not, we will utilize our current fleet to transport people from parking areas to the football field.

Mr. Tom Logan also mentioned that it was interesting that UTRGV staff requested seven high-capacity buses, specifically 57-passenger buses with wheelchair accessibility. As it turns out, this agency is offering seven buses, and we were fortunate to be first in line to receive them. There are many others behind us, so we want to ensure we secure these buses for our use. Then Commissioner Pete Garcia states on behalf of the City of Weslaco, we would like to thank you for your excellent service during the Onion Fest. We truly appreciate your support as part of the committee, and we may need your assistance again for the Fourth of July celebration.

D.2. Consideration and Action to approve Expansion and renovation expenses in relation to TX-2010-125, Harlingen Cares Act at 100% federal funding with no local match. **Ron Mills made a motion to approve Expansion and Renovation expenses in relation to TX-2010-125, Harlingen Cares Act to 100% federal funding with no local match. Troy Allen seconded the motion, upon a vote; the motion was carried unanimously.**

Mr. Tom Logan then states that Valley Metro is seeking board approval for building network installation expenses under this grant, which cover 100% of the costs. This network system consists of a combination of hardware and software components designed to enable communication, data transfer, and resource sharing between devices such as computers, cameras, and servers. The equipment will be installed in our new facility in Harlingen, located in the former AEP building. We're retrofitting this building to serve as our

Harlingen terminal, and we're just 30 days away from getting it up and running. We're very excited to bring this new terminal to the heart of Harlingen, right at the crossroads.

Status Reports: Mr. Tom Logan starts off, first and foremost, I want to thank my staff for their hard work. This was a competitive grant, and after submitting our proposal, the state awarded us funds to expand our demand response service from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. The grant also supports two new commuter routes: one from Willacy County to the City of Harlingen, and the other from Zapata to the City of Laredo. We're currently in the process of launching these routes, which will operate Monday through Friday as an extension of our Metro Express service. This means that people from Willacy County will be able to transfer to Metro Express and travel to destinations like Brownsville, South Padre Island, McAllen, Edinburg, and other cities along the way. We've received tremendous support from Raymondville, and I want to thank the City of Raymondville Commissioner for helping spread the word and for assisting us in organizing a ribbon-cutting ceremony on April 9th at 10 a.m. You will receive formal invitations, but I'd love for you to mark your calendars and join us for the event.

Next, A big thank you to the City of Harlingen for making this possible, including securing the land for the future terminal. Those 12 acres will play a key role in advancing public transportation in our region. This is a significant achievement, and we're incredibly excited about the future of public transportation here. This is a big win for our region.

Moving on, Mr. Tom Logan moved on to the next item on agenda, March 18th was National Transit Employee Appreciation Day, and we want to take this opportunity to thank every single one of our transit employees. They do an outstanding job, not only maintaining and ensuring our buses are reliable, but also providing customer information and support. A special thanks goes to the drivers who are out there every day, as well as the dedicated administrative staff behind the scenes. To show our appreciation, we handed out bags, thanks to the help of our 911 division. There are over 100 hardworking transit employees at Valley Metro, and their commitment is truly appreciated. The giveaways were a great way to recognize their efforts, and we're grateful for everything they do.

Lastly, Mr. Tom Logan mentions that The City of McAllen, through McAllen Metro, hosted the annual Texas Transit Association Conference, Rodeo Competition, and Expo at their convention center, and it was a huge success. Over 500 attendees from across the state participated in the event.

I'm especially proud of our maintenance division, who represented us, the COG, and Valley Metro exceptionally well. We had two teams competing: the heavy-duty maintenance division and the light-duty maintenance division. Thanks to the leadership of Mr. James Campbell, I'm thrilled to share that our light-duty team placed third at the state level, just behind Austin's Capital Metro and the San Antonio area's Swartz. This is a significant milestone for us, as it's the first time we've competed in the maintenance category, and we earned third place.

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

RGVMPO was not able to attend the meeting. No status reports for them currently.

Item #6: New & Unfinished Business: At this time there was no New & Unfinished Business.

With no further questions or concerns, Mayor Norma Sepulveda moved on to Item #7.

Item #7: Adjourn: There being no further business to come before the board, Mayor Norma Sepulveda made a motion to adjourn at 12:58 PM

ATTEST:


Liza Alfaro, Recording Secretary



President, Norma Sepulveda

