MINUTES

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

12:00PM Wednesday August 27, 2025

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

PRESIDING: Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza

Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza called the meeting to order at 12:02 p.m. Roll Call was taken, and as of 12:04 p.m. a quorum was attained.

Present: Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza

Commissioner Ernie Garcia, Willacy County Mayor Ramiro Garza, City of Edinburg Commissioner Pete Garcia, City of Weslaco Commissioner Joey Lopez, Cameron County Mayor Rosa Perez, City of La Villa Mayor David Moreno, City of Donna Mayor Sylvia Castillo, Sullivan City Commissioner Ruben Saldana, City of Mercedes Mayor Alejandro Flores, City of Los Fresnos Commissioner Edward Gonzales, City of Raymondville Mayor Rick Guerra, City of San Benito Ms. Veronica Gonzales, UTRGV Edinburg Mr. Paul Hernandez, South Texas College

Mr. Luke Lucio, TSTC

Mr. Troy Allen, Delta Lake

Mr. Jim Darling, Member-at-Large

Mr. Oscar Garcia, Member-at-Large

Mr. Andres Chavez, Member-at-Large

Ms. Lupita Sanchez Martinez, Grassroots Org

Absent:

Mayor Norma Sepulveda, City of Harlingen Mayor John Cowen, City of Brownsville Commissioner Ellie Torres, Hidalgo County Mayor Javier Villalobos, City of McAllen Mayor Ambrosio Hernandez City of Pharr Commissioner Marco Villegas, City of San Juan Mr. Ron Mills, Willacy Co. Nav. Dist.

Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza moved on to Item#2

Item #2: Consideration and ACTION for approval of June 25, 2025, meeting minutes. Jim Darling made a motion to approve the minutes of the June 25, 2025, meeting, Oscar Garcia seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Item #3: Public Comment – Santiago Salinas Executive Director from RGV Long Term Disaster recovery gave a brief presentation. He started off with, my name is Santiago Salinas, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Rio Grande Valley Long-Term Disaster Recovery non-profit organization. On behalf of our Board of Directors, I would like to formally introduce our organization to the LRGVDC Board and the public. Our mission is to provide recovery assistance to individuals and families affected by natural disasters who lack the necessary resources to repair their homes—especially those without flood insurance or who did not receive aid from FEMA or other agencies. We aim to address issues related to disaster recovery that fall under the jurisdiction of the LRGVDC.

Our team coordinates volunteer labor and supplies construction materials to support the repair of homes damaged by natural disasters. In some cases, families may contribute through sweat equity, helping to rebuild their homes alongside our volunteers. If possible, we also assist in arranging repairs through third-party contractors.

Currently, we are preparing to assist families impacted by the March 2025 floods across Hidalgo, Cameron, Willacy, and Starr counties. Our planning efforts have included, and will continue to include close collaboration with federal, state, county, and local emergency management officials. Additionally, we work alongside a broad network of partners, including individuals, businesses, faith-based groups, nonprofit organizations, and other recovery stakeholders—to gather the funding, volunteers, and materials needed to meet the ongoing needs of disaster survivors.

- 2. Ms. Veronica Gonzales from UTRGV also had something to announce: Altacare Foundation
 - **Ms. Veronica Gonzales** serves on the board of AltacareFoundation.org, a nonprofit company helping people in poverty across four counties.
 - Focus is on colonias and connecting residents with wraparound services from various nonprofits.
 - Their major event, the **Altacare Accelerator Conference**, will be held:
 - September 4
 - o Harlingen Conference Center
 - Free to attend
 - Register at: www.altacairaccelerator.com
 - Includes a poverty simulation to help participants understand the challenges faced by those in extreme poverty.

UTRGV Highlights

- UTRGV was named:
 - o #1 Public University in Texas (for the third year in a row) by Washington Monthly
 - o #7 Nationally
 - #2 Top Hispanic-Serving Institution in the U.S.
- The university has graduated over 60,000 students and is celebrating its 10-year anniversary.
- UTRGV's first football game is:
 - This Saturday
 - o Tailgates start at 2:00 PM
 - Game starts at 7:00 PM
 - o Tailgate is open to the public no ticket required

With no further comments and questions, Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza moved on to Item #4 Administration.

Item #4: Administration

4.A. Presentation on region 15, Regional flood Plan. Mr. Cruz stated that Commissioner Garza sends his regrets; he was unable to attend due to a scheduling conflict. He has been leading a two-year effort focused on flood planning and mitigation in Region 15, which covers 15 counties in South Texas, including the Rio Grande Valley.

Region 15 Flood Plan

- The flood plan has been approved. It is currently undergoing modifications. Included a period for public comment to add new projects
- Motivated in part by the flooding disaster in Central Texas on July 4th, raising awareness and urgency around flood preparedness in the Valley.

Why It Matters

- The Valley's topography makes it especially vulnerable to flooding—described as a bowl. A past study by Dannenbaum Engineering estimated in 2007. The Valley could experience 23–24 feet of inundation. Storm surges could reach as far inland as Los Fresnos.
- The plan and upcoming legislative session will be critical in preparing and funding regional flood solutions.

Next Steps

• The flood planning website will be shared via email so members can: Review the plan. Prepare questions for Commissioner Garza. We are trying to reschedule his presentation, ideally next month or soon after, allowing him to speak directly in his capacity as Chair of the Region 15 Flood Planning Group.

4.A.B. Presentation and Consider ACTION Regarding the 2024 Annual Audit. Melissa Gonzalez, the Certified Public Accountant is here to present the annual audit for the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC) for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2024.

We issued an **unmodified opinion** on the financial statements, which is the highest level of assurance an auditor can provide. This means that the financial statements **present**, in all material respects, the financial position and results of operations of the Council in accordance with **U.S. Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP).**

Importantly, there were:

- No material misstatements
- No significant deficiencies
- No compliance issues identified during our audit.

Financial Highlights

Statement of Revenues, Expenditures, and Changes in Fund Balance (Governmental Funds):

- Total Revenues: \$32.8 million
- Total Expenditures: \$32.8 million
- Ending Fund Balance: \$33,917
 This reflects a stable financial position with no significant change in fund balance.

Statement of Net Position (Balance Sheet Equivalent):

- Total Assets: \$49.6 million
- Total Liabilities: \$30.3 million
- Net Position: \$19.2 million
 - o Most of this net position is tied up in capital assets.

Budget vs. Actual

- Budgeted Revenues & Expenditures: \$40.2 million
- Actual Revenues & Expenditures: \$32.8 million
- Variance: \$7.4 million
 This variance is primarily due to **projects that have not yet been initiated** as of year-end.

Federal & State Programs (Schedule of Findings and Questioned Costs):

- Financial Statement Findings: None
- Federal & State Award Findings: None

This reflects strong internal controls and consistent compliance with all federal and state award requirements. I would like to commend your Finance Director, Crystal Balboa, and her team for their professionalism and dedication. Their commitment to compliance and strong financial management is clearly reflected in these results. Congratulations on another clean audit and a continued demonstration of financial strength and accountability. Mayor Ramiro Garza made a motion to approve Melissa Gonzalez presentation on 2024 Annual Audit, Luke Lucio seconded the motion, upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.

- **4.A.C.** Presentation and ACTION to Accept Quarterly Investment Report. My name is Crystal Balboa, and I am the Finance Director, I have provided the Second Quarter Investment Report, which was included in your meeting packets. If there are no questions, the report is now presented for board approval. **Jim darling made a motion to approve the Quarterly Investment Report; Luke Lucio seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.**
- **4.A.D.** Ratification of Executive Committee ACTION on the Acquisition of Vehicles (transit buses) under TxDOT and FTA Section 5339-Rural Bus and Bus Facilities Program approved Grants for LRGVDC Valley Metro. On August 8th, the Executive Committee approved of the recommendation to proceed with the purchase of buses. This action was taken to help mitigate potential cost increases. The procurement process has already been initiated, and we are now presenting this item to the full Board of Directors for final ratification and approval. **Paul Hernandez made a motion to approve Acquisition of Vehicles (transit buses) under TxDOT and FTA Section 5339-Rural Bus and Bus Facilities program approved Grants for LRGVDC Valley Metro. Mayor Ramiro Garza seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.**
- 4.A.E Consideration and ACTION to Approve consideration and ACTION to Execute Engagement Letter for legal Services for Special Legal Counsel with DNRBS&Z. This item stems from ongoing discussions with the Executive Committee. As you may know, the Board has not historically had dedicated legal counsel present at meetings. The Executive Committee recommended that it would be prudent for us to formally engage legal representation. Attached to your packet is a proposed agreement with Denton Navarro. We've had a long-standing working relationship with this firm dating back to at least 2010. Historically, they have handled various legal matters for us, and in many instances, those costs have been covered through our Texas Municipal League (TML) coverage. This proposal formalizes the business relationship to ensure we have legal guidance readily available when needed. Jim Darling made a motion to approve Engagement Letter for Legal Services for special legal Counsel with DNRBS&Z, Mayor Rosa Perez seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.
- **B. Executive Directors Report.** Mr. Cruz announced all new hires and promotions for the month of July and August. Mr. Cruz then introduced Javier Dominiguez for a quick update.

Javier Dominguez then announced that LRGVDC applied for the **H.E.B. Trees for Texans** grant—and I'm happy to report that we were awarded funding! This grant will allow us to plant much-needed trees here on our main campus. Unfortunately, some of our existing trees have dried up and need to be replaced. This effort is especially important because our main campus includes a half-mile walking trail that's used not only by our staff but also by members of the community. Providing shade along this trail is essential to making it a comfortable and welcoming space for everyone.

We're tentatively planning the tree-planting event for some time in February, and we'll follow up soon with a confirmed date. Once we have that, we'd love to extend an open invitation to anyone from your agencies or organizations who would like to join us. We're also planning to reach out to H-E-B to see if they can help us by providing volunteers for the day. It's an exciting initiative, and we're proud to share it with all of you.

Mr. Cruz then moved on to other reports in the executive Directors Report. As you're aware, I won't be touching on the legislative session today—it's still evolving and changing daily. There are quite a few items already approved on the agenda, and I'm sure we're all staying updated on those developments.

Now, onto some positive news. Yesterday, we had the opportunity to once again advocate for our programs. Through an invitation from the Hidalgo County Prosperity Task Force, Ms. Lopez and I met with Congresswoman Monica De La Cruz. We took this opportunity to advocate strongly for AAA, and we also shared information related to Homeland Security, Criminal Justice, Community and Economic Development, and the critical need for continued funding across these areas. The Congresswoman seemed to have a good grasp of the region's needs. We provided her with comprehensive program materials and discussed priorities at length. As you may recall, all of you signed and submitted a letter from our Chair to our local representatives, along with a box of testimonials and related documents, which were delivered to their Washington offices.

This is, of course, an ongoing effort. The federal budget remains in flux and is changing daily. We're hopeful that Congress will return in time to pass a new budget, but if not, we're looking at a continuing resolution. That would maintain funding at the current levels into the new fiscal year—which, given the uncertainties, is a positive scenario.

As of March, many of our programs were in limbo—some even at risk of being cut. However, as of last month, AAA is back on the table, and it looks like we'll receive steady funding moving forward. That's a huge relief.

In other promising news, FEMA is also back in the conversation for funding. This directly supports our State Homeland Security Program, which funds our first responders' needs for emergency equipment. The state of Texas, overall, received an increase of about \$12 million. While we don't yet know how those funds will be distributed—whether they'll go to Central Texas or to regions—we're optimistic. Given the focus on the border region, we're hopeful the Valley will see some of that investment.

Unfortunately, it often takes a disaster to prompt action, that's just the reality. But we hope this leads to a renewed focus on emergency preparedness. This is something I've worked on personally through our CERT (Community Emergency Response Teams), which train citizens to handle fires, floods, hurricanes, and other disasters. We are in a flood-prone area, and it's critical that we secure funding to ensure we're prepared for whatever comes our way. We'll continue to advocate for every dollar we can get—not just for this year, but for the long term.

No further question or comments, Mayor Norie Garza Gonzalez moved on to Item #5.

Item #5 Department Reports

A. Community & Economic Development:

1. Consideration and ACTION to approve South Texas Clean Cities & Communities Coalition (STC4) bylaws. For us to move forward effectively and ensure our members can carry out their responsibilities, we need to have our bylaws in place. This is also necessary to finalize and submit everything back to the Department of Energy (DOE). The proposed bylaws were included in your packet for review. Currently, I'm requesting your approval of the bylaws. If you have any questions, I'd be happy to address them now. Mayor Ramiro Garza made a motion to approve South Texas Clean Cities & Communities coalition (STC4) bylaws. Mayor Alejandro Flores seconded the motion upon a vote; the motion was carried unanimously.

- 2. Consideration and ACTION to approve South Texas Clean Cities & Communities Coalition (STC4) Stakeholders. Paul Hernandez made a motion to approve South Texas Clean Cities & Communities Coalition (STC4) Stakeholders. Luke Lucio seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.
- 3. Consideration and ACTION to approve LRGVDC to accept a \$10,000 dollar grant contract from National renewal energy Laboratory (NREL) for the purpose of assisting the LRGVDC South Texas Clean Cities & Communities Coalition (STC4) achieve FULL Fledged DOE Coalition Status by developing and submitting complete DOE application based on requirements in the Partnership Structure. The National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), which works closely with the Department of Energy, has offered us a \$10,000 grant. These funds may be used at our discretion to support the transition from an affiliated organization to a fully established coalition. Luke Lucio made a motion to approve accepting the \$10,000 dollar contract from the National Renewal Energy Laboratory (NREL). Oscar Garcia seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.

Program Status Reports: Melisa Gonzales just had a couple of quick announcements.

First, Mayor—thank you for allowing us to be part of your ribbon-cutting ceremony yesterday. I was honored to officially participate in my very first ribbon cutting, and it was a great experience.

Second, I'd like to highlight the great work happening through our outreach efforts. We brought on our new Outreach Coordinator and Customer Service Representative, Crystal, back in May—and she has truly hit the ground running. Between June and August, she has already attended 26 events across our three-county region. This is just the beginning of her engagement with the community, so I encourage all of you—if you have upcoming events, please let us know. We'll do our best to have her present and continue strengthening our visibility and connections in the region.

B. Health and Human Services

Ms. Margarita Lopez wanted to mention that she will have 2 action items to present. They are as follows.

- 1. Consideration and ACTION to approve the Direct Purchase of Services (DPS) Contractor's list. We are requesting approval to utilize the Direct Purchase of Services Contractors List for Fiscal Year 2025–2026. These contractors will provide critical services, including medical transportation, homemaker assistance, respite care, residential modifications, medication assistance, medical supplies, and durable medical equipment. For your review, I've attached the detailed list of vendors and the specific services they offer in Exhibit 1-1. Paul Hernandez made a motion to approve the Direct Purchase of Services (DPS) Contractors List, Mayor Ramiro Garza seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.
- 2. Consideration and ACTION to approve the List of Subrecipients providing services under the Older Americans Act-Services Under Title III. The subrecipients listed will be responsible for delivering key services to seniors in Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy counties, including congregate meals, homedelivered meals, transportation, senior center operations, and caregiver education and training. The full list of subrecipients can be found in Exhibit 2.1. Please note that approval of this list does not assign specific funding amounts. Final allocations will be determined once state and federal funding levels are confirmed. Mayor Ramiro Garza made a motion to approve the List of Subrecipients providing services under the Older Americans Act-Services under the Title III. Veronica Gonzales seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.

Program Status Reports: Margarita Lopez had an announcement. I'd like to provide a brief update on Fiscal Years 2025 and 2026. I've also submitted my semiannual report for your review, which includes data from October 2024 through March 2025.

Regarding the Older Americans Act (OAA), it has not been reauthorized since FY 2024. So, you might be wondering how we're continuing to operate. The answer is that funding has remained stable, with Senate appropriations for FY 2026 maintaining flat funding levels.

I've provided a list of those appropriations, which were initially submitted in December 2022 and approved for use through FY 2026. You can see that list displayed on the monitors.

So, while the OAA is still under review and awaiting reauthorization, we are operating under the appropriations allocated since 2023. That's how we're able to continue providing services this year.

The challenge, of course, is that we are working with year-to-year appropriations, which introduces some uncertainty. However, we remain committed to our mission to continue delivering services and fully executing our grants as we have in the past. We'll keep moving forward and I'll continue to keep you updated as new information becomes available.

C. **Public Safety Criminal Justice and Homeland Security** – There was no action items at this time for Criminal Justice and Homeland Security.

Program Status Reports: First, two weeks ago, we successfully hosted our first annual *Advanced Active Shooter Incident Management Course*—a three-day training held at Knapp Medical Center in Weslaco. We welcomed 45 first responders from across the region, including a few from outside the area. These individuals are now better equipped to respond to active shooter situations not only within their jurisdictions but also in settings like schools, hospitals, and other public spaces. This course is held every two years, and we're already working to bring the next session to the region in either 2027 or 2028, depending on scheduling availability.

Second, our *Listo RGV Conference* is coming up, and we're excited to report that over 120 participants have already registered. We also have a solid lineup of sponsors supporting the event. A major highlight this year: our networking social will be held at Breakaway Cruises—so if you're up for a relaxing evening with ocean views, we encourage you to attend. Additionally, Margaritaville is sponsoring a raffle for a two-night stay at their resort. To enter, you must be present at the conference—so don't miss your chance.

C.2 LRGV Academy Program- I know we didn't get a chance to meet last month, but I want to thank you all for attending our graduation ceremony for the Mission Academy. A special thank-you to the City of Mission for hosting us at the Mission Event Center—it was truly a privilege.

We had 24 cadets graduate, and it was an incredible experience to see their excitement and pride. Your presence meant a lot, and we appreciate your support.

I have three action items to present today, all which stem from our annual Advisory Board meeting, which is a requirement by TCOLE. Our Advisory Committee met on June 24, 2025, to review and discuss key updates

- 1. Consideration and ACTION to ratify the nomination and appointment of Elsa Police Chief Robert McGinnis and Weslaco Police Captain Alvino Flores to the LRGV Academy Advisory Board. Mayor Ramiro Garza made a motion to ratify nomination and appointment of Elsa Police Chief Robert McGinnis and Weslaco Captain Alvino Flores to the LRGV Academy Advisory Board. Mayor Rick Guerra seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.
- 2. Consideration and ACTION to amend the LRGV Academy curriculum to include new licensing courses and Mental Health Pilot Program. Commissioner Joey Lopez made a motion to approve to amend the LRGV Academy curriculum to include new licensing courses and Mental Health Pilot Program, mayor Rick Guerra seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.

3. Consideration and ACTION to ratify the New Lower Rio Grande Valley Academy cadet Rules, Policies, and Procedures Manual as recommended and approved by the LRGV Academy Advisory Board. We've made several important updates to the academy manual. Some of the key changes include Eligibility and enrollment requirements for the following; the disqualification period for marijuana use has been extended—from three years to five years. Applicants who have used marijuana within the last five years are now ineligible. For cocaine, methamphetamine, and opioids, we've implemented a lifetime ban. Previously, the disqualification period was five years, but we've raised the standard to reflect the seriousness of these substances. We also added new sections related to financial payment policies and clarified some definitions throughout the manual. These changes are aimed at strengthening our standards and ensuring the highest level of professionalism in our academy admissions. Jim Darling made a motion to approve to ratify the New Lower Rio Grande Valley Academy Cadet Rules, Policies, and Procedures Manuel as recommended and approved by the LRGV Academy Advisory Board. Commissioner Joey Lopez seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.

Program Status Reports:

We recently hosted the Texas Narcotic Officers Association K-9 Competition and Fentanyl K-9 Training Seminar two weeks ago, and I'd like to briefly share the highlights:

- We had a total of 66 K-9 teams in attendance, representing 18 different law enforcement agencies across local, state, and federal levels.
- Additionally, we welcomed five international K-9 teams from Mexico, including teams from Nuevo Laredo, Monterrey, Culiacán, and Saltillo.
- Our team assisted these international agencies in training their dogs to detect fentanyl, enhancing interdiction capabilities south of the border.
- Locally, we now have 28 certified K-9 teams in the Rio Grande Valley trained specifically in fentanyl detection. Agencies with certified teams include:
 - Alamo Police Department
 - Mission Police Department
 - Edinburg Police Department
 - Brownsville Police Department
 - San Benito Police Department
 - South Padre Island Police Department
 - Cameron County Sheriff's Office
 - Hidalgo County Sheriff's Office
 - Hidalgo County Constable Precinct One
 - Edinburg CISD Police Department
 - La Joya ISD Police Department

End of Training and Grant Cycle Report: We are also wrapping up our current training and grant cycle, which ran from September 1, 2023, through August 31, 2025. Here are the final numbers:

- In-service courses taught: 247
- Total officers trained: 3,637
- Total instructional hours: 8,567
- Total contact training hours: 157,014

Police Academy Outcomes (Primary Mission):

- Number of academies conducted: 8
- Total cadets enrolled: 154
- Cadets who passed the TCOLE licensing exam: 149
- Regional peace officers added: 149
- Overall pass rate: 96.75%

We're proud of this success and are aiming for a 100% pass rate in the next grant cycle.

C.3 Rio Grande Valley Emergency Communication District Program Updates - No action items today—just a brief report.

I want to take a moment to highlight our **Third Annual Public Safety Wellness Seminar**. You should have the event flyer on your desk. This event started with a simple, but powerful, goal: **to support the mental wellness of our 9-1-1 telecommunicators**—the first to answer the call when someone is in crisis. Since its inception, the seminar has grown significantly, expanding its reach to the broader public safety community and reinforcing the importance of **caring for those who take care of us**.

This year, the seminar will take place on **September 30th at the Mission Event Center**. A special thank-you to our Board President, **Mayor Norie Garza**, who will be delivering the opening remarks. Your leadership and commitment to mental health awareness in public safety is truly appreciated and will help set the right tone for the event.

We are honored to welcome two keynote speakers:

- Chris Fields, a retired firefighter from the Oklahoma City Fire Department
- **Brock Bevell**, a retired detective from the Arizona Police Department

Both will be sharing powerful, personal stories that speak to the emotional challenges faced by public safety professionals—and how they've navigated their careers while supporting others.

In addition to speaker sessions, this year's seminar will feature an Exhibit Hall, providing valuable wellness resources and services for attendees. We remain committed to investing in the mental health and wellness of our first responders and telecommunicators, and this seminar is a key part of that mission.

This is a free, all-day event and open to the public—please feel free to share the registration link with your networks, including local police departments and other public safety agencies. A QR code is included in the flyer for easy registration.

Finally, we will also be taking time during the event to honor excellence in our field, including:

- The Telecommunicator of the Year Award
- The Sandra Coronado Award, recognizing outstanding service among our 9-1-1 professionals

These awards reflect the dedication and resilience of those on the front lines of emergency communication.

We hope you all attend and show your support for our Public Safety Community.

D. Valley Metro Transportation -

Program Status Reports - No action Items at this time, Tom Logan wanted to give a quick update on Valley Metro Transportation. Year-to-date, we've recorded a total of 739,000 passenger trips. We've provided 89,000 service hours and covered approximately 1.9 million service miles. Overall, the system is operating in a very healthy and efficient state.

D.1 RGVMPO - No reports to report currently.

Item #7: Adjourn: There being no further business to come before the board, Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza made a motion to adjourn at 12:52 pm

President, Norie Gonzalez Garza

ATTEST:

Liza Alfaro, Recording Secretary