

MINUTES

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

12:00PM WEDNESDAY, February 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 Norie Gonzalez Garza

Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza called the meeting to order at 12:04 p.m. Roll Call was taken, and as of 12:06 pm quorum was attained.

Present: Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza

Judge Aurelio Guerra, Willacy County
Mayor John Cowen, City of Brownsville
Mayor Ramiro Garza, City of Edinburg
Commissioner Pete Garcia, City of Weslaco
Commissioner Ellie Torres, Hidalgo County
Mayor Alma Salinas, Sullivan City
Mayor George Guadiana, City San Perlita
Mayor Gilbert Gonzales, City of Raymondville
Commissioner Tom Goodman, City of San Benito
Ron Garza, UTRGV Edinburg
Mr. Paul Hernandez, South Texas College
Luke Lucio, TSTC
Mr. Jim Darling, Member at Large
Mr. Tony Chavez, Member at Large
Ann Williams Cass, Member at Large

Absent :

Mayor Norma Sepulveda, City of Harlingen
Cameron County
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
Troy Allen, Delta Lake ID
Ronald Mills, Willacy County Nav Dist.
Lupita Sanchez Martinez, Grassroots Org

Without any questions from the board, Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza moved on to Item #2

Item #2: 1. Consideration and ACTION to approve Board of Directors Meeting Minutes for January 29. ***Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve Meeting Minutes for January 29, 2025. Jim Darling seconded the motion and upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***

Item #3: Public Comment- No Public Comment

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

Item #4: Administration

Mr. Cruz introduced Mr. Javier Dominguez to present action item. The purpose of this document is to provide an opportunity for all sister organizations and programs directly associated with the COG to outline their goals and strategic objectives for the next five years. It also includes some high-level objectives on our part, such as preparing for the census, conducting research on the mergers of the MSA, exploring the potential benefits of such mergers, and evaluating the Regional Transit Authority.

We opened a two-week window for feedback, and we received valuable input. Mr. Garza from UTRGV recommended that we reach out to the partnership to explore their legislative priorities. Upon doing so, we found significant overlap with many of our own programs, which is encouraging. As a COG, we also recognize the importance of the items mentioned in this document, and we plan to incorporate these recommendations into our future research.

At this point, I'm open to any questions. Otherwise, we would just need your approval to finalize and adopt this draft, making it official for the next five years. One final point, and I apologize for the oversight. In the past, we've looked at updating this document every two years. As we mentioned last month, we've been committed to revisiting this document in two years to see whether any changes or updates are necessary at that time.

4A. Consideration and ACTION to approve LRGVDC 2025-2030 Strategic Plan. ***Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan. Judge Aurelio Guerra seconded the motion, upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***

With no further questions or comments, Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza then moved on to the next item on the agenda.

Executive Report: Mr. Cruz introduced all new staff to the board. Then Mr. Cruz moved on to Updates on Regional News, Funding Opportunities, Training, and Legislation. Before I begin, I'd like to thank Mr. Jim Darling for attending the Texas Association of Regional Councils' bi-annual meeting and training. It was very informative. Mr. Darling, I'd like to give you the opportunity to share any additional comments or insights on other items you found noteworthy or worth discussing.

Mr. Darling: Yes, they covered a broad agenda, including topics that align with many of the programs we have, but on a statewide level. Some of the important legislation that will impact us was discussed, and I will make sure to share updates as we receive them. I've always recognized the value of COGs; I was with the first COG, the Houston-Galveston Area Council, back in 1978 when they first signed contracts for Motorola radios. So, I truly understand how important COGs are in a statewide context. It's an exciting time, and while the upcoming legislative session will be challenging, I remain optimistic.

Mr. Cruz stated that he previously shared a report with several links, and it is still available on our website for anyone interested in exploring it. These links cover the items we discuss at the state level during our annual meetings with state and federal partners. They provide the latest updates, especially for 2025. Given the change in administration, much work has been underway, both positive and negative. However, currently, we do not foresee any impact on our grant funds, particularly those from the federal government to the state, if we comply with the new administration's standards.

I've thoroughly reviewed each of the programs we have at the COG, and none of them appear to conflict with the new federal agenda. Everything is aligned with the current administration's priorities, so we do not anticipate any program disruptions currently. As always, I will keep you informed as new information becomes available.

As previously mentioned, aging programs, such as Meals on Wheels and senior services, which are federally funded, could be impacted if there are cuts or cancellation in funding. Additionally, transportation, which is a large component of our work, is also federally funded. We have not received any updates from the Federal Transit Administration, so it remains business as usual.

Finally, yesterday we had the honor of unveiling the RGV Broadband Regional Plan. Mayor Sepulveda attended and spoke on behalf of the LRGVDC Board of Directors as we officially endorsed the plan. This is a comprehensive, collaborative effort involving all partners who are willing to participate. The plan is a living document, subject to annual updates based on federal or state requirements.

This regional plan addresses the digital divide, and it is well-crafted. We are excited about the opportunity to apply for funding, not only for our organization but also for cities of all sizes and counties. There are still two county plans pending: Willacy County and Starr County. As these plans come online, they will be incorporated into the regional plan, providing a clear overview of broadband access across the region.

Additionally, we have received preliminary notice that we, as the COG's, may be eligible for funding to address broadband literacy, particularly for the elderly. While this is still in the early stages, we are optimistic about receiving these funds and using them to support our community.

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

A. Community & Economic Development: Melisa Gonzalez had no Action items on the agenda for her department.

Status Reports: Mrs. Gonzales had some announcements. Thank you, Manuel, for the great introduction to the digital broadband plan. It's an excellent plan, and we are proud to be part of it. It's exciting to see that, hopefully soon, the RGV will have no communities without internet access, that's the goal.

Today, I don't have any action items, just a few announcements.

First, we are working on finalizing the updates to our Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. These updates are nearly complete, and we plan to present them to our Economic Development Advisory Committee in the second week of March. Following their review and any suggested changes, we aim to bring the finalized strategy to the board for approval at the March board meeting, scheduled for March 25th.

Second, we will be hosting a workshop for the South Texas Clean City Coalition on March 27th. This workshop will bring together our committee members to finalize the bylaws, elect officers, and establish a meeting schedule. Once these items are finalized, I will present the bylaws to the board for approval so that we can continue moving forward with the STC-4.

Lastly, I want to announce that our tire recycling event, "The Road to Recycling," is scheduled for Wednesday, April 23rd. We've decided to hold it on a weekday to accommodate smaller cities that may not have weekend staff. We are finalizing the logistics, including contributions for transportation and disposal costs per community. We'll have more concrete details after our meeting with the vendors on Friday, and we'll share the final logistics with you as soon as possible.

No further Questions or comments, Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza then moved to Health & Human Services

B. Health & Human Services: Margarita Lopez had no Action items on the agenda.

Status Reports: Ms. Lopez let the board know that all she had for them today was a couple of announcements. I don't have any action items today, but I do want to highlight a series of impactful events that I encourage you to review—not only as leaders in your community but also as individuals who, like everyone else, have personal needs. Each of you has a folder with specific details for these events, and I invite you to look at them.

The first event I'd like to announce is the **LIIFE Conference**, taking place next Wednesday. This is the third time we've hosted this event. At the conference, we will offer sessions on several important topics. These include empowering siblings and individuals with disabilities, as many people worry about caregiving for aging parents, but often adults also have siblings with disabilities who need care. We'll address this issue and provide support for those who may have increased responsibilities due to life events.

Additional sessions will cover basic budgeting and financial wellness, parent-teacher collaboration during assessment stages, stress management and mindfulness for caregivers and leaders, and applying for disability benefits, which will be hosted by our Benefit Counseling Department. We'll also have a session on recruiting family members for childcare support and strategies for anger management for parents. For professionals attending the conference, we will offer up to **four CEUs**.

The second event I want to highlight is on **April 15th**, which is specifically designed for professionals: **Future Planning for Professionals**, focusing on navigating benefits, retirement, and advanced care. This event will be in-person only, and we are limiting attendance to **15 individuals** due to the sensitive nature of the topics being discussed. Our goal is to ensure everyone feels comfortable asking personal questions and receiving more individualized answers.

This session, led by our benefit counselors, will include three key topics:

1. **Retirement Planning** – covering Social Security, Medicare, early retirement considerations, and long-term financial stability.
2. **Applying for Disability Benefits** – including information on SSI, SSDI, Medicaid waivers, and how to navigate the application process.
3. **Hospice Care and Advanced Directives** – helping professionals understand end-of-life planning, legal considerations, and making informed healthcare decisions.

This event is specifically designed for professionals in the community. If you can't attend on April 15th but have a group of **10 to 15 people** who would benefit from this training, we can bring this session to your organization or community. If you have a space with a podium or microphone, we'll be happy to come to you and share this important information.

Other upcoming events include **Military Cultural Competency Training** and **ASK Training**, which focuses on suicide prevention skills.

Please take a moment to review the details in your folder, sign up if you're interested, or let us know if you'd like us to come to your community or organization. Feel free to share this information with anyone who might benefit from it. Lastly, you have my report on our performance during the month of January in the packet provided.

No further questions or comments Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza moved on to Public Safety.

C. Public Safety: Criminal Justice & Homeland Security. Mr. Cesar Merla was recognized and stated, one action item for today is the consideration and approval of a new Homeland Security Advisory Committee member. In February, Michael Kester, the previous member representing the city of Harlingen, retired. As per the bylaws, Deputy Chief Alfredo Arias has been appointed as the new representative for Harlingen, and this appointment requires board approval.

C1. Consideration and Action to approve the Homeland Security Advisory Committee (HSAC) Member. ***Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve the Homeland Security Advisory Committee (HSAC) Member. Mr. Ron Garza seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***

Status Reports: Additionally, along with the report, my department, in collaboration with the City of Pharr Office of Emergency Management, will be hosting a three-day eGrants training next week, March 4th, 5th, and 6th, at the Pharr One Center. This training is aimed at jurisdictions in the area that use the eGrants system, which is utilized by the Governor's office to prioritize and manage the public safety grants distributed each year. This is an excellent opportunity for grant managers to learn how to navigate the system. If you have a grant manager or someone new to the process, please encourage them to register. The room has been expanded to accommodate up to 80 individuals each day. A big thank you to the City of Pharr Office of Emergency Management for their support, and we look forward to seeing you all at the training next week.

Mr. Cruz then stated, one upcoming item is that the Executive Committee will need to convene, either virtually or via email, to address the Homeland Security grant prioritizations. The state is releasing the applications, and the release date does not align with the board meeting schedule. The applications are expected to be available to us by March 6th. We will have a few days to prioritize and ensure everything is in order. The Homeland Security Advisory Committee will meet on Friday, March 14th, and the list of priorities is due by March 19th, which means there is a very quick turnaround. Therefore, we will need to convene the Executive Committee and then ratify the item at the next Board of Directors meeting.

No further questions or comments Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza moved on to LRGV Police Academy.

C.2 LRGV Police Academy: Mr. Javier Solis had no Action Items on the Agenda.

Status Reports:

1. Police Academy Enrollment & Updates:

- Currently, there are 43 cadets enrolled across two separate police academies:
 - **228th Academy** hosted by the City of Mission
 - **129th Academy** hosted by LRGV Academy
- The police academy project in **Starr County** has been completed.
 - This will be the first-ever academy hosted in Starr County, in partnership with the **Rio Grande City Police Department**.

- The academy will be at full capacity with 30 cadets enrolled.

2. **LRGV Academy & In-Service Training:**

- The focus for 2025 is advancing the certification of officers within the region, aiming to help them achieve **intermediate, advanced, and master peace officer certifications**.
- Several **advanced courses** are scheduled, including:
 - Trauma-Informed Sexual Assault Investigations
 - Advanced Vehicle Compartment Detection
 - High-Risk Narcotic Operation Planning
 - Mental Health Crisis Recognition
- Instructor-level courses are being offered to certify officers to return to their departments and deliver necessary education.
- **Firearms Instructor Course:** 20 officers are being certified as firearms instructors at the **Donna Shooting Range**.

3. **Alert Active Shooter Training:**

- **Mandated active shooter training** for all officers must be completed by **August 31, 2025**.
- Four separate courses are scheduled for **March 2025** at the COG in Weslaco.

4. **South Texas All Hazards Conference:**

- Preparations are underway for the **2025 South Texas All Hazards Conference**, a major event in the Rio Grande Valley.
- **Hidalgo County** has partnered with the LRGV Academy to handle **TECO training hours** for Texas peace officers attending the conference.

5. **Mental Health Pilot Program for Law Enforcement:**

- In partnership with the **Nueva Luz Foundation**, the LRGV Academy is launching a **mental health pilot program** aimed at addressing the stigma of seeking help in law enforcement.
- **Heart Rate Variability (HRV) Training** will be introduced to cadets during their academy training to help reduce the stigma of asking for help and improve mental health resilience among officers.
- Two instructors will be trained in HRV, and the program will be integrated into the new curriculum for cadets. The objective is to teach cadets early in their careers that seeking help is acceptable.
- **Program Impact:** The goal is to follow a group of cadets through their first year of service to assess the program's impact on mental health and well-being.
- Additional equipment investment will be required, and an action item will be requested in future meetings.

6. Conclusion:

- The academy is excited about the mental health program and looks forward to the potential positive impact it will have on law enforcement officers. The initiative is not about recognition but about making a difference and saving lives.

No further questions or comments Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza moved on to the Rio Grande Valley Emergency Communication District.

Status Reports: Mr. Dennis Moreno started off with no action items on Agenda but wanted to give an update. **Texas Public Safety Conference:**

- The **Texas Public Safety Conference** will be held from **April 2nd to April 5th** at the **McAllen Convention Center**.
- This is a **week-long conference** focused on **telecommunications** and **dispatchers**, who are often the first responders to emergencies.
- The conference will cover a variety of topics, including **wellness, action during emergency calls**, and other key areas related to the role of telecommunicators.
- This conference is the largest of its kind in Texas and is a great opportunity for staff and Valley personnel to learn and network.
- It is the **first year** the event will be hosted at the McAllen Convention Center, and the goal is to continue hosting it in the region for another 2 or 3 years.
- It is encouraged to share this information with your team and staff to promote attendance and participation.

No questions or comments, Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza proceeded to Item D Valley Metro.

D. Transportation Valley Metro: Mr. Tom states good afternoon, honorable board. There are **three action items** for discussion.

D.1. Consideration and Action to Approve Executive Director to Initiate and enter into an agreement between LRGVDC Valley Metro and Edinburg Economic Development Corporation, along with the procurement procedures for the completion of Edinburg Transit Terminal Phase III. **Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve Executive Director to Initiate and enter into an agreement between LRGVDC Valley Metro and Edinburg Economic Development Corporation, along with the Procurement for procedures for the completion of Edinburg Transit Terminal Phase III. Jim Darling seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.**

D.2. Discussion and Action on Approve Executive Director to Initiate and submit a grant application to the Texas Department of Transportation TXDOT. **Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve the Executive Director to Initiate and submit a grant application to the Texas Department of Transportation TXDOT. Paul Hernandez seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.**

D.3. Discussion and Action on approval of Resolution #2025-02 Authorizing the Executive Director to execute a Resolution authorizing the filing of applications with the Federal Transit Administration. **Mayor Alma Salinas made a motion to approve the Resolution #2025-02, authorizing the Executive Director to execute Resolution authorizing the filing of applications with the Federal Transit Administration. Mayor Gilbert Gonzalez seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.**

Status Reports: Lastly Mr. Logan then stated, Year-to-date ridership is at **390,000**, showing a continued increase, indicating strong demand. Services are being run as scheduled. A special thanks to the **City of McAllen** for hosting the **Texas Transit Association Annual Conference and Expo** and **Bus Rodeo** next month. **Valley Metro/LRGVDC** will have employees participating, with **two teams of mechanics** and **two drivers** competing in the event.

No further Questions or comments, Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza then moved to Rio Grande Valley MPO.

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

No further questions or comments Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza moved on to Item #6

Item #6 Executive Session:

1. Personal matters under section 551-074 (1) to deliberate the appointment, employment, evaluation, reassignment, duties, discipline or dismissal of a public officer or employee RE: Executive Director Annual Performance Evaluation. **Mayor Ramiro Garza made a motion to approve Personal matters under section 551-074 (1) to deliberate the appointment, employment, evaluation, reassignment, duties, discipline or dismissal of a public officer or employee RE: Executive Director Annual Performance Evaluation. Commissioner Ellie Torres seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously**

All board members stayed in the Ken Jones board room and all staff and attendees stepped out of board room, while executive Session was in session.

2. Reconvene into an Open Session to consider Action, if any questions on items related to the Executive Session as described above. **Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve, Mayor Alma Salinas seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.**

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

With no further questions or concerns, Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza moved on to Item #8.

#8 Adjourn: There being no further business to come before the board, Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza made a motion to adjourn at 1:15 PM



President, Norma Sepulveda

ATTEST



Liza Alfaro, Recording Secretary