

MINUTES

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

12:00PM WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2024

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 12:05 p.m. Roll Call was taken, and as of 12:07 pm quorum was attained.

Present: Mayor Norma Sepulveda

Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza, City of Mission
Judge Aurelio Guerra, Willacy County
Mayor John Cowen, City of Brownsville
Mayor Ramiro Garza, City of Edinburg
Commissioner David Garza, Cameron County
Commissioner Ellie Torres, Hidalgo County
Mayor Alma Salinas, Sullivan City
Mayor George Guadiana, City San Perlita
Mayor Alejandro Flores, City of Los Fresnos
Commissioner Omar Quintanilla, City of McAllen
Commissioner Edward Gonzales, City of Raymondville
Mayor Rick Guerra, City of San Benito
Veronica Gonzalez, UTRGV Edinburg
Paul Hernandez, South Texas College
Mr. Troy Allen, Delta Lake
Mr. Ronald Mills, Willacy County Nav. District
Mr. Jim Darling, Member at Large
Mr. Tony Chavez, Member at Large
Ms. Ann Williams Cass, Member at Large
Ms. Lupita Sanchez Martinez, Grassroots

Absent :

Mayor Adrian Gonzalez City of Weslaco
Mayor JR Garza, City of Alamo
Mayor David Moreno, City of Donna
Mayor Ambrosio Hernandez City of Pharr
Commissioner Marco Villegas, City of San Juan
Mr. Luke Lucio, TSTC

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

Item #2: Consideration and ACTION to approve Meeting Minutes for September 25, 2024. **Mayor John Cowen made a motion to approve Meeting Minutes for September 25, 2024. Lupita Sanchez 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 Sepulveda moved on to Item #4.

Item #4: Administration

4A. Presentation from Texas Census Institute with Angela Broyles Executive Director for Texas Census Institute.

Key points: We are a nonprofit organization established in the fall of 2021 to support census participation in the state of Texas. Our mission is to address and overcome both operational and motivational barriers to ensure greater participation in the census across the state. I'll briefly go over some of this at the start since I don't have much time. I just want to give you an overview of our organization. Right now, we're focusing a lot of our work in the Rio Grande Valley. As many of you probably know, the census impacts funding, representation, planning, research, and advocacy. The data collected is used daily for these purposes to help us better serve our communities. The 2020 Census conducted by the Census Bureau had an undercount, and after the census was completed, they conducted a Post-Enumeration Survey to check their work. The survey estimated that the state of Texas was undercounted by half a million people. Our research team did further analysis, focusing on the undercount of young children, and found that 153,000 children were missing in the census. We also collaborated with academic partners to assess the economic impact, and we estimate that Texas will lose \$25 billion in federal funding over the next 10 years due to this undercount. There are over 350 programs that rely on census data for funding distribution in Texas, so the undercount has significant implications for the state's resources and services.

We have conducted further analysis to assess the economic impact of the undercount on specific demographics and regions. Using data from the Post-Enumeration Survey, we identified the statewide undercount and then worked with the Texas Demographic Center to break it down by county. We also examined how this undercount affects programs at both the county and regional levels. For example, in the four counties of the Rio Grande Valley, the undercount of young children alone is expected to result in a loss of approximately \$160 million over the next 10 years. This loss will impact programs such as childcare development block grants, nutrition programs, education, and healthcare. These are some of the potential financial shortfalls the region could face due to the census undercount. My work, along with the work of the Institute, began after the 2020 Census. Before that, I served as a consultant for a statewide campaign focused on engaging and motivating people to participate in the census. This experience highlighted several challenges that Texas faced, which led to the creation of the Texas Census Institute. One key challenge I want to highlight today is low participation in LUCA, the Local Update of Census Addresses program.

While most people focus on census participation, LUCA addresses a critical operational element: updating the master address list used by the Census Bureau. LUCA is a voluntary, once-a-decade

opportunity for tribal, state, and local governments to review and update their address lists with the Census Bureau. Governments can add, correct, or delete addresses to ensure the accuracy of the census count.

In Texas, many areas, including Hidalgo County and the Rio Grande Valley, had strong participation in LUCA. However, overall participation remains a barrier, and one of our goals is to advocate for full statewide participation in LUCA to improve the accuracy of future census data. This slide shows national participation in LUCA. The blue areas represent counties that participated, and the yellow areas indicate when the state participated on behalf of those counties. If you look at the next slide, you'll see a breakdown of Texas. The gray areas indicate regions that did not participate in LUCA. These are primarily rural areas, as well as some urban and metropolitan regions that missed out on participating in LUCA. Moving to the next slide, we can see the Rio Grande Valley (RGV). Except for Willacy, all the RGV counties participated in LUCA. This region is considered an exemplary by the Census Bureau and serves as a model for the rest of the state. Ms. Broyles shared that this next slide shows the results of Hidalgo County's participation in LUCA. They successfully added 14,000 addresses to the Census Bureau's list, corrected 15,000 addresses, and removed 5,000 inaccuracies, leading to substantial improvements in the Bureau's address database. So, why should you participate in LUCA? We view it as a critical operational step. If the Census Bureau lacks an address, they won't send a questionnaire to that household. Additionally, there's no way to indicate that someone lives there, which increases the likelihood that the household will be overlooked and not counted in the census.

We've also analyzed the potential return on investment (ROI) of participating in LUCA. By ensuring the address file is accurate and households are properly enumerated, we can significantly improve census data and secure more accurate funding and resources for communities. We estimate the return on investment at about \$113 per household. For Hidalgo County, by participating in LUCA and updating their address list, they potentially secured an additional \$1 billion in federal funding from 2020 to 2030. One important development to note is that due to the exemplary work done by Hidalgo County and the other RGV counties, the Census Bureau is interested in piloting an initiative in the Rio Grande Valley. The goal is to partner with Hidalgo County to focus on improving LUCA participation, particularly in colonies and non-traditional communities with unconventional addresses. The pilot is expected to run from this fall into next summer.

The Census Bureau aims to use this pilot to refine the LUCA process and scale those improvements nationwide, with Hidalgo County serving as a model. We hope that by participating in this initiative, we can collaborate with the county to develop a statewide strategy for full participation in LUCA. The key partners in this initiative will include the Hidalgo County Planning Department, the GIS Department, the Texas Demographic Center, and ideally, additional city and county representatives from across the Rio Grande Valley to support these efforts. We would appreciate the support of the Planning Department and other members of the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council in our efforts. Specifically, we're looking for partners to help promote the research of the Texas Census Institute, advocate for participation in the LUCA pilot with the Census Bureau and Hidalgo County and contribute to the development of a statewide plan for LUCA participation.

Ms. Ann Cass then mentioned to Ms. Broyles that have you been in contact with anyone at Hidalgo County? About six months ago, I spoke with the Planning Department Director, Brandon, and his assistant, Rosemary. However, the person who handled LUCA for the county in 2020 is no longer there. I was just curious if she has spoken to them recently and how interested they are in bringing

LUCA back. Ms. Broyles then states that Yes, we have been in contact with them. We've been providing advice, and they seem interested, but they are looking for more information and direction from leadership on how to proceed with LUCA.

With no further questions or comments, Mayor Norma Sepulveda then moved on to Item 4B.

4B. Presentation on Active Transportation and Active Tourism Plan. With Ylda Capriccioso with Halff Associates. Mr. Cruz wanted to clarify that before Ms. Capriccioso began her presentation, he wanted to inform everyone that this plan is funded by Hidalgo County for all 22 cities within the county, and that they weren't leaving Cameron County behind. Mr. Cruz also mentioned that Hidalgo County is working to connect the dots with this plan, focusing on multimodal transportation resources, including identifying current and future hike and bike trails, as well as other related infrastructure. This plan will also serve as a tool for securing future funding for projects, such as the construction or expansion of hike and bike trails, parks, or other developments within each jurisdiction. Ms. Ylda Capriccioso started working with the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC) and our funding partner, the RGVMPPO, about a year ago to develop an active transportation and active tourism plan. This plan aims to unite regional trail efforts across a large area. Our project team includes Half Associates, and we have partnered with local engineering firms B2Z and Tool Design for the active tourism component.

The goal of the project is to identify opportunities for developing a regional network of bike and pedestrian infrastructure that would also serve to boost tourism within the communities of Hidalgo County. This is the primary purpose and objective of the plan. The project consists of six phases, and we have nearly completed all of them. We are currently in phases five and six, which involve integrating transportation and active tourism recommendations into an implementation agenda for Hidalgo County. The key outcomes of the project align with the original goals, including advocating for regional priorities that will enhance access to state and federal funding. This united effort also fosters collaboration, which is critical for promoting inclusive growth and prosperity in the region. Finally, the project aims to align resources efficiently and avoid duplication of efforts in the development of regional trail projects.

The region boasts over 100 destinations, including parks and open spaces. Notable sites include two state parks and a US Fish and Wildlife National Wildlife Refuge. Hidalgo County's population is growing, though, as previously mentioned, there may be undercounts in the census data. As such, the actual population could be higher than the figures currently reported. The area is home to over 300 butterfly species, a key attraction for nature enthusiasts, particularly those visiting the Rio Grande Valley to experience its butterflies, birds, and other natural resources. **Trails and Biking Facilities**, the region has nearly 200 miles of on- and off-street trails or biking facilities. The public engagement process included a series of outreach efforts, one of which was a steering committee that met four times. There will be one more meeting with the steering committee. Commissioner Torres was mentioned as a participant in the steering committee. The presenter noted that there are several slides related to public engagement, but only the first slide will be discussed in detail during this session. The following are some of the key themes that emerged from the sessions and interviews conducted during the outreach and engagement process. **Safety Concerns**: A primary concern expressed by participants was the need for safe crossings across roadways, ensuring both pedestrians and cyclists can travel safely. **Lack of Connectivity**: While there are excellent trails within the region and across several communities, there is a recognized gap in connectivity, particularly between the eastern and western areas. **Collaboration**: There was strong emphasis on continuing the successful collaborative approach. Stakeholders expressed satisfaction with current teamwork and agreed that it should be further developed and maintained.

Integration of Public Health: Participants expressed interest in exploring how public health initiatives could be integrated into the project, particularly to improve access to trails, biking, and pedestrian infrastructure. **Financial Constraints:** There was recognition of financial limitations at both the local and regional (county) levels, which may influence the scope and timeline of the proposed projects. **Ongoing Community Engagement:** It was highlighted that continued community engagement is essential to ensure broad support for the initiative and that the region remains informed of the project's progress.

Access for Low-Income Populations: Ensuring equitable access to trails and transportation options for low-income communities was emphasized as a key consideration. **Trail Development and Maintenance:** Considerations regarding the development, maintenance, and necessary upgrades of trail sections being constructed or proposed in the plan were discussed. The active plan consists of six chapters, each covering different aspects of the project: **Chapters 1 & 2:** These chapters focus on outreach efforts and the guiding principles of the plan. **Chapters 3 & 4:** These sections examine the active transportation network and framework. **Active Tourism Chapter:** A dedicated chapter that focuses on active tourism within the plan. **Final Chapter:** This chapter outlines the delivery of the implementation plan, including the short-term work program, administrative guidance, program funding, and the overall work plan. The plan is built around six guiding principles, which serve as the foundational framework that helps direct the strategies, recommendations, and implementation efforts. The vision for the active plan was developed through collaboration with the steering committee and public input. It is to create a signature countywide trail network in Hidalgo County that: Connects communities and provides a safe and comfortable environment for walking, biking, and other forms of active transportation. Links users to key destinations across the county. Promotes a culture of active living and improves transportation access throughout the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The following slides provide demographic data that was gathered to align with areas identified as needing improved transportation options, access, and connectivity.

In addition to active transportation, tourism was identified as a significant factor influencing how people spend their leisure time in Hidalgo County. Tourism plays a key role in how visitors enjoy and recreate in the area, and this impact is something the community is likely already familiar with.

As part of the active transportation network and framework, the existing transportation system was evaluated. Currently, the county has:

- Approximately **123 miles** of on-street bike facilities.
- **73 miles** of off-street bike facilities.
- Over **1,700 miles** of sidewalks.

The following slides provide a snapshot of some of the municipal trail systems that are part of the existing network. In addition to the transportation network, we gathered input from the steering committee and staff regarding key destinations across the county. These destinations fall into various categories, including Civic, Cultural, and educational sites, Event spaces, medical facilities, Parks and nature areas, Retail locations. We categorized these destinations and mapped them out to align with the regional trail network, allowing us to cross-reference this information to identify connections and opportunities for integration. Next, I will cover the trail segments and provide more detail on four specific subsegments identified in the plan.

To identify these trail segments, we used criteria based on regional goals and priorities established by the steering committee. The plan proposes **nine trail segments**, which together cover over **170 miles** of on- and off-street proposed trails. This number has since increased to just over **200 miles**.

While the map may be difficult to read on screen, the **teal or light blue solid line with dotted segments** represents the proposed regional trail network. The map does not specifically identify all nine segments, but they are broken out in the plan with details on key destinations, potential opportunities, and challenges associated with each. These segments are numbered starting from one through nine.

We have assigned preliminary names to the nine trail segments to help us explore and identify their locations within the community and the region. These nine segments are the building blocks of the **200-mile regional trail network**.

As part of the assessment process, we considered factors such as population density and low-income statistics to determine where each trail segment would have the most impact. The segments were ranked based on:

- The number of people who would benefit from improved access.
- The communities that each segment would serve.
- The tourism opportunities are connected to each segment.

The next section focuses on the **active tourism approach** and the related recommendations.

As part of this effort, we worked with our sub-consultant to review existing destinations within the county. Additionally, we coordinated with local chambers of commerce and other stakeholders to better understand the tourism landscape in Hidalgo County.

Several opportunities were identified, including:

- **Trail tourism**, which is a growing trend both nationwide and statewide in Texas.
- **Bicycle tourism**, which complements the trail network.
- **Water trails**, including the Texas Paddling Trails and other water trails across the nation.

Some of these opportunities already exist within the county and its communities.

In addition to trail, bicycle, and water tourism, **wildlife and birdwatching** are already strong tourism markets in Hidalgo County and the Rio Grande Valley. The plan aims to build on these existing strengths.

The plan also emphasizes the importance of identifying **cultural and educational trail components**, ensuring that key cultural and heritage sites are highlighted along the trail network.

Two additional tourism opportunities were mentioned:

- **Los Mirasoles Wind Farm:** This proposed initiative could create a new type of tourism in the region. Like other areas with wind farms, the idea is to develop a short segment (1-2

miles) where visitors can tour the wind farm, learning about the energy production process. This would be classified as an **energy tourism attraction**.

- **Hub Towns Approach:** This concept focuses on developing regional hubs for tourism and other activities, though further details on this approach were not specified in this section.

The **Los Mirasoles Wind Farm** concept is gaining traction on the West Coast of the United States, and with several wind farms in the region, including the one in Hidalgo County, there may be an opportunity to incorporate this into the local tourism offerings in the future.

Another concept explored in the active tourism component is the **Hub Towns** approach. This focuses on identifying communities with multiple attractions that could serve as key starting or ending points for trail destinations, whether for walking or biking. These towns would act as central hubs to encourage tourism and engagement with the trail network.

Moving on to the **Implementation and Short-Term Work Program**, the primary goal was to develop an active transportation network that aligns with local, state, and MPO plans and policies. The plan was designed to be consistent with:

- **Active tourism recommendations.**
- **Stakeholder and community feedback.**
- **Economic health and transportation principles**, including safety, access, and connectivity.

The key goals for **active transportation** and **active tourism** include:

- **Building a regional trail network.**
- **Increasing branding and awareness** of the trail system.
- **Supporting comfort and usability** for all users.
- **Aligning with healthy and active lifestyles.**
- **Ensuring connectivity and transportation choices.**
- **Promoting natural and cultural links.**
- **Supporting local economic vitality.**

Next Steps: We've identified **nine trail segments**, and based on these, we recommend starting with **four initial segments** for further development or study.

The first of these is **Trail Segment 7**, which would connect the existing trail network being constructed through the precinct trails down to the state park. This segment builds on the existing infrastructure and cultural links, ensuring a seamless connection between key destinations. The following **trail segments** were identified as priorities for future development:

1. **Central Hidalgo County (Segment 8):** This segment focuses on better connecting **Mission** and **McAllen** through projects that address gaps in east-west trail connections. Both cities have strong north-south trail systems, but there are significant gaps in east-west connectivity. This segment aims to ensure safe and seamless transportation across these communities.
2. **Edinburg Area (Segment 9):** Building on existing trail and bike lane work in **Edinburg**, this segment would strengthen the east-west connection, extending onto future proposed trail segments. The goal is to support safe bike and pedestrian transportation, particularly for students, visitors, and faculty at the local university, ensuring better mobility throughout the community.
3. **Elsa Area and Katakata Trail Connection:** This segment aims to connect existing trail work in the **Elsa** area to bike lanes in nearby communities, integrating with the **Katakata Trail** system developed in **Cameron County**. The focus is on creating a link that enhances active transportation options and connects with regional trail networks.

The key element of the implementation plan focuses on maintaining momentum for the active transportation network and program. The plan outlines the following steps for ongoing administration and coordination:

- **Steering Committee Continuation:** The plan recommends continuing the work of the **steering committee** to sustain the progress of the active transportation plan.
- **Municipal Support:** Each participating municipality is encouraged to adopt a **supportive resolution** in support of the active plan.
- **Interlocal Agreement (ILA):** The **LRGVDC**, **RGVMPO**, and **Hidalgo County** are advised to enter an **interlocal agreement** to formalize roles, responsibilities, and resource sharing for the continued development of the plan.

The plan also highlights the need for:

- **Program funding opportunities** and **high-level planning costs** associated with the proposed trail segments.

Short-term work programs that define specific objectives and strategies to guide the partners, including those involved in the interlocal agreement (ILA), trail management agreements, and partnering cities, to continue advancing the plan. The plan includes key **performance measures** to guide the success of the project. These measures operationalize the **trail management framework** and outline the cooperation needed between **Hidalgo County**, the **LRGVDC**, the **MPO**, and the participating cities. The goal is for these partners to collaborate in creating a **policy committee** or a continued **steering committee** that will work together to identify and implement trail projects.

The plan includes a **short-term work program**, which provides a matrix detailing:

- **Goals, objectives, and strategies.**
- The **timeframe** for accomplishing these objectives.
- The **lead or partnering agencies** responsible for each task.

Next steps include:

- **Final Steering Committee Meeting:** A final meeting will be held to review the draft report.
- **Updates and Feedback:** Comments from staff at the **LRGVDC** will be incorporated into the final report.
- **Final Report Distribution:** The completed report will be distributed to stakeholders for review in **December**.

The goal is for the participating cities to adopt **city resolutions** in support of the active plan between now and **January**. After that, we will return to request **final approval** of the active plan from the **LRGVDC Board**.

Ms. Ann Cass then had a comment, So I know the presentation was on tourism, but I don't want us to forget that there's thousands of people who need transportation, who live in Hidalgo County.

With no further comments or questions from the board, President Norma Sepulveda moved on to 4C.

4C. Consideration and ACTION to Adopt Annual Investment Policy and Accept Quarterly Investment Report. ***Jim Darling made a motion to Approve to Adopt Annual Investment Policy and Quarterly Investment Report. Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza seconded the motion and upon a vote, the motion was carried unanimously.***

4D. Consideration and ACTION to Appoint Board Designee and Alternate to Texas Association of Regional Councils. (TARC). Mr. Cruz began by addressing the current members of the Council. As you may know, **Commissioner Garza** is stepping down from the Council of Governments due to his ongoing commitments in **Cameron County**. Commissioner Garza has been the primary representative for the region at the **Texas Association of Regional Councils** in Austin.

Mayor Darling is currently the alternate. We have discussed this with Mayor Darling, and he is willing to step up to the primary position. However, we do require the board's approval to either appoint him as the primary or confirm his role as the alternate. Mayor Norma Sepulveda was appointed the alternate. Mr. Cruz emphasized that it is always beneficial to have our **elected officials** attend meetings in **Austin**, noting that while the rule requires travel, it is **reimbursable**. Additionally, he highlighted that the **COGS** meet as a **Board of Directors** in Austin, offering an opportunity for networking, interaction, and learning from what other COGS are doing. Mayor Norma Sepulveda mentioned that she would be happy to do it if they had no volunteers. Commissioner David Garza then stated the only comment I would like to make is that sometimes these meetings are not held in **Austin**. They can take place in other locations such as **Sherman** or **Palestine**, and occasionally they are held in more remote areas of the state. While Austin is typically convenient for travel, these alternate locations can present more logistical challenges. Commissioner Garza then stated that he would like to appoint Mayor Sepulveda as the Alternate. Seconded by Commissioner Ellie Torres, upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously. Mr. Cruz clarified that the meetings held in various locations across the state are intended to give different communities the opportunity to showcase their unique features and offerings. He expressed hope that, in the future, the meetings could be held in **South Texas**, allowing everyone to travel to the region.

Is there a motion to appoint **Mayor Darling** as the primary representative? **Commissioner David Garza made a motion to approve Jim Darling for the Designee and Alternate to Texas Association of Regional Councils. Commissioner Ellie Torres seconded the motion and upon a vote, the motion was carried unanimously.**

No further comments or questions Mayor Norma Sepulveda then moved on to Item 4E. Executive Report.

As you may have noticed, the large **orange bus** is parked in the front lot. This is a reminder that **early voting** is currently underway, and the **election** will take place on the **5th**. Thanks to **Mayor Sepulveda's** recommendations and initiatives, we are offering **free rides** to the community, provided they show proof of voting, such as a **registration card, driver's license**, or any valid form of ID.

This morning, we had the opportunity to capture a brief video, which we will be posting on our **social media** platforms, including **Facebook**. It was also a rare opportunity for me to give some of you a ride, and I encourage you to share and promote the post.

This initiative is available across the **five-county areas**, making it easy for everyone to access polling locations, with the opportunity to go vote.

Moving on to the next item on the agenda: **Introduction of new staff.**

Regarding the other items on the agenda, I will keep this brief as I provided the details in advance. I would like to reiterate the update on the **GLO Disaster Recovery Relocation Program**. The **call for projects** is currently open, having started on **October 21st** and will close on **November 21st at 5:00 p.m.** I strongly encourage everyone to apply. I have shared the **PowerPoint presentation** previously, which contains valuable information and important deadlines. Again, I highly recommend submitting your applications.

Please note, this is just the first stage of the call for projects, and the process involves multiple steps. I encourage you to watch the **video** and review the **slides** or share them with your **grants department** or **planning department** for further review. Additionally, our region qualifies under **Dolly** and the **2018 floods**, meaning there is still a significant amount of funding available from those projects for applicants.

Lastly, I have a list of our objectives for the **89th Legislative Session**, developed at the **Texas Association of Regional Councils** in collaboration with all the **COGs** across Texas. The list covers a wide range of initiatives, including **community economic development, environmental quality, emergency communications, health and human services, public safety, and transportation**. Each of these areas contains specific goals and objectives, and I believe we have addressed nearly all the key priorities that benefit our local communities.

No further comments or questions, Mr. Cruz then turned it over to Javier Dominguez for a quick recap on upcoming events. I will keep this brief, and I apologize for not being there in person today. However, I am representing LRGVDC in Phoenix, Arizona, attending a one-on-one training with the **National Renewable Energy Lab** and the **Department of Energy**. You will soon hear an exciting announcement from **Mrs. Gonzalez-Rosas** regarding an important opportunity for our region.

I would like to take this point to highlight two **upcoming inaugural events** that the LRGVDC will be hosting at the end of this year and the beginning of next year. The first event is the **Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony**, which will take place on **Monday, December 2nd**, from **10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.** It will be held in the **lobby outside the Ken Jones Boardroom**, where all of you are currently located. We would like to extend an invitation to all board members to join us for this festive occasion. This is also an opportunity for us to express our gratitude to those who have generously provided sponsorship. We will be serving **coffee and light snacks**, and there will be a **Christmas Sweater Competition**. We have already been coordinating several city secretaries to add this to your calendars, but we will be sending out formal invitations soon. We look forward to seeing you there and introducing you to the extended family here at the LRGVDC.

The second event is the **inaugural 2025 LRGVDC State of the COG**. This meeting will typically feature our **annual report and budget presentation**, but we aim to elevate the experience this year. This event usually takes place on the **second Wednesday of January**, and in December, we will ask the board to confirm the final date selection for the meeting. We are seeking your recommendations regarding the **date** for our **2025 LRGVDC State of the COG** event, tentatively scheduled for either the **second or third Thursday of January**. The event will take place from **11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.** During this meeting, we will present our **annual report and budget**. However, we also want to take the opportunity to highlight the hard work and dedication of all the agencies and departments associated with the **COG**.

Additionally, in our efforts to promote the **LRGVDC** and its regional impact, we would like to recognize **staff members** from the cities and counties within the region. This will be the first time we have hosted an event of this nature, and we aim to honor about **six staff members**. To this end, we kindly request that the board members present today recommend staff members from their respective cities or counties to receive this recognition. We will be sending out **nomination criteria** in a separate email, and your prompt recommendations will be greatly appreciated. We are still finalizing the event location and may hold it at the **Ken Jones Boardroom**, with catering arrangements in place. We are also seeking sponsorship for the event, ensuring that **program funds** are not utilized for this initiative.

Mr. Dominguez emphasized just to be mindful of the upcoming events and we are planning accordingly. Mr. Cruz then mentioned that January 9th appears to be the date we typically hold this meeting during the second week of the month. During this time, we invite the general membership and the Board of Directors to review and approve the budget, which will then be recommended to the Board of Directors by the end of January. The sooner we can meet, the better, as it will give us ample time to compile the necessary information. As mentioned, this will be the first-ever State of the COG address, and we hope to establish a strong foundation for this event to continue annually.

No questions or Comments, Mayor Sepulveda then moved on to Item 5 Department Reports.

5A. Community & Economic Development.

5A1. Ms. Gonzalez started off with Department Action item. Consideration and ACTION to approve RGV Economic Development Advisory Committee (RGV EDAC) Membership. At the September 26, 2024, EDAC meeting, the committee approved the following nominations:

Membership Category	Entity
Texas Workforce Development	Workforce Solutions – Hidalgo County
Texas Workforce Development	Workforce Solutions – Cameron County
Member-at-Large	COSTEP

Troy Allen made a motion to Approve RGV Economic Development Advisory Committee membership, Ron Mills seconded the motion, upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.

Department Status Reports.

First, our Region M meeting is scheduled for next week, November 6th, at 9:30 AM. The meeting will be held virtually, and you can find more information on our website.

Next, I would like to extend our gratitude to the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) for organizing a floodway tour for some of our staff. We had the opportunity to visit Retamal Dam and the Amistad Dam, which was an incredible experience. If you've never been out there, it's truly an amazing site. In particular, the Amistad Dam is quite fascinating, as it sits right on the border between Texas and Mexico. I'd like to thank Frank and Juan from IBWC for coordinating the tour.

Lastly, as Javier mentioned earlier, I'd like to share some exciting news. Over the past seven months, Javier and I have been working closely on an application for the Clean Cities Coalition here in South Texas, in collaboration with Sam Spofforth from the Department of Energy (DOE). We are thrilled to announce that our application has been successful, and DOE has officially recognized the South Texas Clean Cities and Communities Coalition (STC4) as an apprentice coalition in the Clean Cities and Communities Partnerships. Our kickoff meeting is scheduled for Monday, and we are proud to be the fourth coalition in the state of Texas. There are currently three other coalitions in the state, and when we approached DOE about starting one, they encouraged us to include the Coastal Bend counties, as well as the areas from Corpus Christi to Laredo. As of now, we have nine members across this region, and we plan to add more members as we continue to grow. This is truly exciting news for our community.

Jim darling then stated that for Region M, we are nearing the completion of the five-year plan. If your municipality does not have a water strategy in place, such as purchasing additional water resources, it is essential to include it in the plan now. Failing to do so will make you ineligible for Texas funding. Additionally, if you want to amend the plan later, the process can be lengthy and costly. I recommend reviewing the plan with your city and ensuring that all relevant strategies are included. It's a simple step now that will help avoid complications in the future.

No further questions or comments, Mayor Sepulveda moved on to Item B

B. Health and Human Services.

Ms. Lopez started off with I would like to remind everyone that it is Medicare open enrollment season, which began on October 15 and ends on December 7. This is a critical time for our older adult community, and our benefit counselors are available to assist with any necessary changes. This year, there are significant changes in the network of doctors, particularly for those enrolled in Advantage plans. Many of these plans do not require co-pay, but only if the doctor is within the network. If individuals' current doctors are no longer in-network, they may face co-pays, which could disrupt their healthcare.

It's crucial that we review their current plans to ensure they can continue receiving uninterrupted services. Changing doctors can be especially challenging for individuals over 60, who often have a long history with multiple healthcare providers. The transition to a new doctor could delay treatments and prescriptions, which can lead to further complications.

This is a sensitive issue, and we need your help in spreading the word. Our benefit counselors are available to assist in person or at home for those who are unable to visit our office. We just need to know who and where they are so we can provide the necessary support. Flyers in both English and Spanish are available at the sign-up table—please feel free to take them and share the information. Thank you for your support in ensuring older adults have access to the healthcare they need. I have one important announcement to share. We are excited to announce our third annual Veterans Festival, and I would like to give a special shout-out to Mayor Garza and his team for their outstanding support. They've been fantastic in ensuring that we have everything we need for this event.

This year, the festival will be held at La Palma Adult Daycare, located at 1215 South Expressway 281 in Edinburg, Texas. The event is sponsored by Eliazar Rodriguez, the Municipal Court Judge in Elsa. We are aiming to engage as many of the 3,113 veterans currently registered in Edinburg, though there are over 18,000 veterans in Hidalgo County and counting. We encourage veterans from Cameron County, Willacy County, and beyond to join us as well.

The festival will take place on November 20th, from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. We look forward to seeing as many veterans and community members as possible for this special event. We will be hosting a barbecue pit raffle at the event, and participants must be present to win. These raffles are exclusively for veterans. Additionally, there will be various health screenings available. One notable service we will be offering is the Eye box, which is a device used to assess concussions. This screening is available for individuals aged 5 to 67, regardless of whether they are veterans.

If a child or adult has participated in any games and has experienced any falls or head impacts, the Icebox offers a quick, non-invasive assessment. The test involves simply placing the face near the device, which measures eye pressure to detect any signs of concussion. This service will be provided at no cost and is a great opportunity for individuals to ensure their safety after a potential head injury.

In addition, we will kick off the Veterans Festival with the Heroes in Action LRGVDC Veteran First Responders Marksmanship Competition, hosted by the Police Academy at El Indio Law Enforcement Gun Range on November 19th. This event will precede the main festival and promises to be an exciting start to the celebrations. The event will be held in Donna, but as you know, we serve the entire region, so we encourage everyone to join us for the festivities. We have many exciting activities planned to honor our veterans.

Additionally, I have provided my quarterly report, which covers the fourth quarter from July to September 24th.

No further questions or comments, Mayor Sepulveda moved on to Item C.

5C. Criminal Justice & Homeland Security

Mr. Merla started off with department status reports. There are no action items on the agenda today, so this will be a quick update. The status report is provided for your review. The months of September and October have been quite busy, with a strong focus on delivering training throughout the region.

As you can see, staff have been actively engaged in various training initiatives, including preparedness planning, hosting 25 individuals for training, conducting dam evaluations with economic development teams, and providing first responder training. Our goal is to bring these resources to the RGV, not only for first responders but also for individuals across the region who can benefit from this training.

Looking ahead, our upcoming training session will focus on de-escalation for law enforcement, but we've confirmed that this session is open to all professionals. If you know anyone in law enforcement, including fire marshals, counselors, or other city employees, please encourage them to attend.

Additionally, this Friday, in collaboration with Behavioral Health Solutions of South Texas, we will host a Naloxone (Narcan) training session. This all-day event will take place from 9:30 AM to 3:00 PM, with one-hour training slots. Participants can register using the QR code provided. Upon completion, each participant will receive a Narcan kit and a certificate confirming their training.

The urgency of this training cannot be overstated, as fentanyl has caused significant harm alongside other substances like cocaine and methamphetamine. Narcan can extend a person's life by up to 10 minutes or more, depending on the dosage administered. If you know anyone who could benefit from this training, please direct them to attend. The first session had 35 participants, and we are expecting nearly 50 individuals this time around.

Mayor Sepulveda made a comment, I know that we did the "Save a Life" training in Harlingen, it was a crucial initiative that drew significant participation, especially at a time when the issue was prominently covered in the news. However, it's important to emphasize that we should not wait for a crisis to occur before taking proactive steps in addressing these measures.

No further questions or comments, Mayor Sepulveda then moves on to Police Academy.

I have two action items to present, and I will keep them brief as I know everyone's time is valuable.

First, as you may recall, I previously discussed Senate Bill 1852, which mandates that every Texas peace officer receive 16 hours of ALERRT (Active Shooter) training every two years. This is now a state requirement. We have successfully trained over 300 officers to date; however, one of the ongoing challenges we face is the logistics of securing the necessary equipment for this training.

5C1. Consideration and ACTION to utilize LRGV Academy generated program income funds for the purchase of an ALERRT Level 1 Active Shooter Training Kit in the amount of \$46,375.13. Ron Mills made a motion to approve to utilize LRGV Academy generated program income funds for the purchase of ALERRT Level 1 Active Shooter Training kit, in the amount of \$46,375.13. Commissioner Ernie Garza seconded the motion and upon a vote, the motion was carried unanimously.

5C2. Consideration and ACTION to Approve Amendments to the Interlocal Agreement for Cooperation Extension Services and the LRGV Academy Site between the Lower Rio Grande Development Council and the City of Mission Texas. **Ron Mills made a motion to Approve the Amendments to the Interlocal Agreement for Cooperation Extension Services and the LRGV Academy Site between the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council and the City of Mission. Lupita Sanchez seconded the motion and upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.**

The Mission Police Department is exploring alternative recruitment strategies. As part of the revised interlocal agreement, the number of tuition-free slots allocated to the department for hosting has been increased. They are now entitled to five tuition-free slots, in addition to five slots offered at half tuition. Furthermore, the overall capacity of the academy has expanded, with the maximum number of students increasing from 24 to 30.

LRGV Academy Status Reports

I am pleased to highlight a significant achievement in my recent reports: on October 11, 2024, our 224th Basic Peace Officer Academy from Weslaco held its graduation ceremony. A total of 15 cadets graduated, and I am proud to report that, for the second consecutive academy, we have achieved a 100% pass rate on the state licensing exam. Every cadet from the past two academies has successfully completed the exam and is now serving in various police departments. The Mercedes Police Department was the largest recipient, hiring six of our graduates. Additionally, other agencies benefiting from this academy include the Sullivan City Police Department and the Cameron County Fire Marshals. In total, 15 new officers have been deployed to the region this past month, and we are proud to continue contributing to the region's law enforcement needs. A total of 15 courses were conducted, and we successfully trained over 300 officers. Year-to-date information has been included in the report.

Currently, the LRGV Academy is in a strong position in terms of training capacity. I would like to express my gratitude to all our partners who have contributed to the establishment and continued success of this program for the region.

With no questions or comments, the meeting proceeded to the Action Items for Valley Metro. It was noted that the Status Report for the Rio Grande Valley Emergency Communication District is included in the packet distributed to all attendees.

Item D Transportation Valley Metro.

D1. Consideration and ACTION to Approve Acquisition of Vehicles under a State approved Grant for LRGVDC Valley Metro. **Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve the Acquisition of Vehicles under State Approved Grant for LRGVDC Valley Metro. Ron Mills seconded the motion and upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.**

We have been awarded two grants: one from TechStat and the other from the FTA. These grants will be used to purchase of two replacement buses.

D2. Consideration and ACTION to approve Hardware Acquisition for LRGVDC Valley Metro. ***Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve Hardware Acquisition for LRGVDC Valley Metro. Mayor John Cowen seconded the motion and upon a vote, the motion was carried unanimously.*** We acquire IT equipment to upgrade our computer systems, as well as our telecommunications hardware and software.

Mr. Logan then mentioned that our reports are included in the provided packet.

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

Eva Garcia started off with I am pleased to introduce Mr. Medina, our new Executive Director. While I am excited to say that we have nine million dollars available, my primary focus today is to provide an opportunity for our new Executive Director to meet all of you. Good afternoon, my name is Michael Medina, and you can refer to me as the "new guy." I am truly humbled and excited to be here, and I look forward to serving the Valley. As Mr. Medina mentioned, I bring over 20 years of experience in transportation planning and policy development, with extensive collaboration with our Mexican counterparts and beyond. One of my key priorities moving forward is to strengthen these partnerships.

You will hear me frequently refer to the term "regional significance." This concept is central to our efforts, as we want to ensure that the plans being developed throughout the Valley are recognized by the MPO and supported in their implementation. If you need anything, please don't hesitate to reach out. I will make sure my contact information is readily available, and I am always happy to take a call. Eva with RGVMPPO started off with for those who may not be familiar with federal funding processes, we receive both apportionments and allocations. The MPO is responsible for programming the funds allocated to our region. One of the key funding programs we manage is the Transportation Alternatives Program (TA), also known as the Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside (TASA). Local governments in our region receive this funding, and they are required to obligate and then reimburse it.

We are one of the few MPOs that has a dedicated allocation for TASA funding. While other areas can still apply through a statewide call for projects, which will have about \$20 million available for programming, we conduct separate calls for projects. These projects must focus on bicycles, pedestrians, or micro-mobility infrastructure, primarily for transportation purposes rather than recreational use. Additionally, these projects must have a direct connection to the surface transportation system, provide a public benefit, and be publicly accessible.

Examples of eligible projects include shared-use paths, side paths, separated bicycle lanes, and other bike lane types. We are preparing to open a new call for projects with \$9 million available for funding. For more information, visit our website at RGVMPPO.org under the "Funding Opportunities" section. The federal funding amount available for programming is outlined, and we have a program guide, scoring criteria, and the application itself available on our website. We will be opening a long call for projects starting November 1st. If your community requires technical assistance, we are available to help with mapping or application guidance. The application deadline is January 31st.

While I intended to review the scoring criteria in detail, I will skip that due to time constraints. However, some key factors in the scoring process include project readiness, resiliency, safety, equity, and connectivity. Additionally, the application includes questions regarding whether your project is part of an approved plan. For communities within Hidalgo County, the Hidalgo County Active Plan will be a valuable resource. In Cameron County, the Caracara Trails plan is available, and for those in Willacy or Starr County, please feel free to reach out to me for assistance in identifying relevant state plans that may include your projects.

If your project is selected for funding, the RGVMPO will help monitor key development milestones. This includes ensuring that the state DOT processes advanced funding agreements efficiently. You will have approximately one year from the time of the award to work with the state on these agreements. We also track the progress of your project, and we encourage timely action—projects that obligate funds to receive positive recognition. However, if a project fails to oblige its funding, those funds will lapse, which can negatively impact the region. One of the primary reasons we closely monitor project obligations is through the Federal Project Authorization Agreement. Once you receive authorization to proceed, you can begin submitting billing to the state and federal government for reimbursement, as this is a reimbursement-based program.

To assist with the process, we are offering two workshops, both covering the same content. The first will be held on November 1st at 1:30 PM, and the second on November 13th, also at 1:30 PM. These workshops will be recorded and posted online, so even if you're unable to attend, you can access them on our website. However, attending in person allows for real-time questions and helps us identify areas where additional clarification may be needed.

The key timeline of activities for the Transportation Alternatives Program is as follows:

- This Friday, we will open the call for projects and host the two virtual workshops, which will be recorded.
- Responses to any questions received will be posted by November 27th.
- The deadline for requesting technical assistance is December 23rd.
- The application deadline is January 31st, providing about three months to develop and submit a project application.
- In February, our staff at the MPO and the state will review applications before they are sent to evaluators, including bicycle and pedestrian advocates and other community representatives.
- We expect to complete the approval process and announce the awards by May.

We understand that these projects require time to develop, and we are here to support you throughout the entire process. With that, are there any questions regarding the RGVMPO's Transportation Alternatives Call for Projects opening this Friday?

With no further questions or comments Mayor Sepulveda moved on to Item #7

#7 New & Unfinished Business

There being no further business to come before the board, Mayor Sepulveda made a motion to adjourn at 1:18 PM



President Mayor Norma Sepulveda

ATTEST:



Liza Alfaro, Recording Secretary