MINUTES

MEETING OF THE
LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY
DEVELOPMENTCOUNCIL BOARD OF DIRECTORS
MEETING

12:00PM Wednesday September 30, 2026

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: Judge Aurelio Guerra

Judge Aurelio Guerra called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m. Roll Call was taken, and as of 12:05 p.m quorum was attained.

Present: Judge Aurelio Guerra

Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza, City of Mission
Commissioner Ellie Torres, Hidalgo County
Councilman Rene Pena, City of Sullivan City
Mayor Pro-Tem Ruben Saldana, City of Mercedes
Councilwoman Aarin Hartwell City of South Padre Island
Commissioner Edward Gonzales, City of Raymondville
Mayor Pete Galvan, City of San Benito
Mr. Ron Garza, UTRGV
Mr. Paul Hernandez, South Texas College
Mr. Luke Lucio, TSTC
Mr. Jim Darling, Member-at-Large
Mr. Troy Allen, Delta Lake
Mr. Ernesto Cavazos, Willacy Co, Navigation District
Mr. Oscar Garcia, Member-at-Large
Mr. Andres Chavez, Member-at-Large
Ms. Lupita Sanchez Martinez, Grassroots Org

Absent:

Mayor Omar Ochoa, City of Edinburg
Mayor John Cowen, City of Brownsville
Mayor Norma Sepulveda, City of Harlingen
Mayor Pro Tem Pete Garcia, City of Weslaco
Commissioner Joey Lopez, Cameron County
Mayor Pablo Morales, City of Lyford
Mayor David Moreno, City of Donna
Mayor Javier Villalobos, City of McAllen
Mayor Ambrosio Hernandez City of Pharr
Commissioner Marco Villegas, City of San Juan

Mr. Cruz stated that before we move on to item two, Mr. President, with legal counsel's consent and approval, I would like to pause the meeting briefly to discuss a situation that we were just made aware of, if that is okay with legal counsel. No action will be taken on this matter.

Let me begin by saying that September has certainly not been an easy month for the LRGVDC. We have received some unfortunate news, but one of the most significant is that one of our members will soon be departing.

Mr. Jim Darling, as many of you know, has shared with me that he will be moving to San Antonio. I only learned of this last week, so unfortunately, he did not give us enough time to properly prepare a service award for him. However, we hope Jim can join us next month so that we can give him the proper send-off and recognize you with the service award you deserve.

Mr. Darling has been a dedicated member of the LRGVDC for 15 years. His service with the Council began in 2011, when he was serving as a commissioner for the City of McAllen. Jim took up the mantle and represented the City of McAllen on the LRGVDC Board. As you may recall, Jim was elected Mayor of the City of McAllen in 2013 and served in that position until 2022. Since 2022, Jim has continued to serve as a member-at-large and has remained a strong champion for the COG.

Jim also holds numerous leadership and committee positions. Quite frankly, I have lost count of how many committees you have served on. Another one is as President of Region M.

It is truly difficult to see you leave this region, especially because we are losing the wealth of knowledge and experience that you bring to the table. On behalf of the LRGVDC, on behalf of myself personally, and on behalf of our entire staff, I want to sincerely thank you for your many years of dedicated service.

I know Jim and I have had many conversations. Not only here in the region, but also at various events and venues where I have represented the LRGVDC through the Texas Association of Regional Councils. Through all of those experiences, I have seen firsthand the commitment and dedication you have always shown to the COG.

Whether you were serving as a commissioner, as Mayor of the City of McAllen, or as a member-at-large, you were always there for the COG. You consistently did what was best for the organization and for this region. You volunteered your time and expertise for countless committees and initiatives, and you never hesitated to step up when your service was needed. And, of course, your involvement with the COG goes back even further, including your work as legal counsel with the 911 program.

So, Mr. President and members of the Board, while it is certainly sad to see Jim leave, we want to take this opportunity to recognize him and, most importantly, thank him. Jim, on behalf of the LRGVDC, our staff, and this entire region, thank you for your years of dedicated service, your leadership, your commitment, and for always being a champion for the Council. We wish you and your family nothing but the very best in this next chapter, and we look forward to properly recognizing you next month.

Judge Aurelio Guerra also shared a few words, he stated that we certainly echo those sentiments, Mayor, and we appreciate everything you have done for this region. You have represented people and communities throughout the entire region, and your service and dedication have made a lasting impact. In addition to your service with the LRGVDC, you have also served as the attorney for the Willacy County Hospital District, further demonstrating your commitment to the people of this region.

We are all going to miss you, but fortunately, this is not goodbye just yet. There is still more to come. So, on behalf of the Executive Board, and with the support and permission of the Board members, I would like to ask you to take over the gavel today and preside over the remainder of this meeting.

Jim Darling also said a few words; By the way, Willacy County is my last client. I closed my law practice a number of years ago, and they told me that the only way I could get rid of them was to pass away. So, as long as I am still around, I guess I will continue making my way to Willacy County. They are great people out there.

It has truly been a great career. While as the COG's president every time I became president, we seemed to get a new Executive Director. So, I hope that is not going to happen today!

But, in all seriousness, the LRGVDC is a great organization. The reason I originally became involved with the COG was because, at the time, I felt like the COG was taking programs away from the cities and bringing them into regional programs. One of those programs was 9-1-1, which was certainly one of the big ones. I remember thinking, "If you can't beat them, join them." So, I did and I am actually very glad that I did. It has truly been a labor of love, and I am grateful for the many years I have been able to be a part of this organization and serve alongside so many great people throughout the region.

Item #2 Consideration and ACTION to approve meeting Minutes August 26, 2026. ***Mr. Paul Hernandez made a motion to approve the August 26, 2026 meeting minutes. Mr. Ernesto Cavazos seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***

Item #3: Public Comment – there being none, president then moved on to item #4.

Item #4: Administration

4.1. Presentation on Texas Demographic Center. Mr. Cruz started by saying, as you know, the Census is right around the corner, and it is never too early to get engaged and begin preparing for what we need to do to ensure that everyone in our region is counted. The Census has a significant impact on our region, particularly when it comes to federal funding, resources, and the services provided to our communities. With the possibility of changes under the new administration, we want to make sure we are ahead of the game, proactive, and prepared to participate in any way, shape, or form that we can. Our goal is to ensure that we achieve the most accurate count possible for the Rio Grande Valley. By increasing participation and making sure our residents are counted, we can hopefully maximize the funding allocations that come back to our region for the many programs and services that we provide to your constituents. It is important that we begin that work now and continue working together to make sure the Rio Grande Valley is accurately represented and receives the resources it deserves.

Mrs. Monica Cruz with the Texas State Data Center started the presentation with; Good morning, everyone. I am honored to be here with all of you today. I am especially proud to say that I am a product of the Rio Grande Valley. I was born in Brownsville and raised in Los Fresnos before leaving the Valley to pursue my education in San Antonio and at The University of Texas at Austin. It is truly a privilege and an honor to be back here with all of you.

I am with the Texas Demographic Center, which is part of the Office of the State Demographer, Dr. Lloyd Potter. We are housed at the University of Texas at San Antonio. One of our major responsibilities is producing population estimates for the state, counties, and cities throughout Texas, as well as biennial population projections for the state and all Texas counties.

We work very closely with the U.S. Census Bureau. Several of us, including myself, serve on national steering committees where we regularly meet with staff from the Census Bureau. We are not Census Bureau employees,

nor do we receive funding from the Census Bureau, but we work very collaboratively with them. We are also part of the State Data Center Network. Despite the name, this is not the type of data center you may be thinking of. The network has actually been around for several decades, and I serve as the lead coordinator for the Texas Demographic Center.

Texas Population Growth

I want to share a few highlights regarding population growth. According to the most recent population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau, Texas has now reached a population of approximately 31.7 million people. Between 2024 and 2025, Texas added approximately 391,000 residents, representing about a 1.2% increase.

While Texas continues to grow, this represents a smaller increase than we experienced in previous years. We have seen population growth nationally begin to slow down somewhat. We are still growing, but not at the same rate we have seen in the past. The map you see here provides a graphical representation of population growth across Texas counties between 2024 and 2025. The darker-shaded counties experienced the greatest population growth, while the lighter-shaded counties experienced more modest growth. Some counties actually experienced population declines.

We also continue to refer to the Texas Triangle, where we see some of the greatest population density in the state from the Dallas Fort Worth area to Bexar County and San Antonio, and then to Harris County and Houston. To give you another perspective on population distribution in Texas, approximately 87% of the state's population resides on or east of Interstate 35, which runs from Webb County and Laredo through Central Texas and into North Texas. That really illustrates how Texas continues to grow and where much of that population growth is concentrated.

Population Growth in the Rio Grande Valley

I also want to share a few data points regarding population growth in Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy counties. Since 2020, we have seen considerable and continued growth, particularly in Cameron and Hidalgo counties, while Willacy County has remained relatively stable.

As shown on the previous map, Hidalgo County continues to demonstrate significant population growth, particularly over the past year. We also have data showing population growth within individual cities. I know the map is a little difficult to see, but the darker-shaded areas represent the cities experiencing the greatest growth.

Some of the areas that stand out include Hidalgo and Weslaco, as well as portions of La Joya. Laguna Vista and Bayview have also experienced growth. Overall, the majority of cities throughout the Lower Rio Grande Valley continue to grow, with some exceptions, particularly in portions of Willacy County where populations have remained more stable.

Population Projections

As I mentioned earlier, we also produce population projections for the state and its counties. Organizations such as the Texas Water Development Board, the Texas Department of Transportation, and other state agencies use our population data when planning for the future.

The projections shown here illustrate expected population growth between now and 2060. It is important to note that we update our population projections every two years. The projections shown here are based on our 2024 data. We are currently working on the next set of population projections and analyzing current growth patterns.

We anticipate releasing our updated population projections toward the end of this year or early next year. As a result, some of the projections shown here may shift as new population data becomes available.

Preparing for the 2030 Census

I also want to talk briefly about something that I discussed with Mr. Cruz: We are already preparing for the 2030 Census. Between 2010 and 2020, Texas experienced greater numeric population growth than any other state.

However, following every decennial Census, the Census Bureau conducts what is called a Post-Enumeration Survey. This process evaluates how accurately the Census counted the population. As we all know, 2020 was a very complicated year. There were significant operational challenges associated with conducting the Census, particularly because the official Census Day was April 1, 2020, and the COVID-19 pandemic began affecting communities just weeks before that date.

Following the 2020 Census, the Census Bureau determined that Texas was one of six states where there was likely an undercount. The estimated undercount for Texas was approximately 500,000 people. The Census Bureau does not conduct that same analysis at the county or local level, but we know traditionally that certain populations and geographic areas are more likely to be undercounted for a variety of reasons.

Regardless, undercounts can have a significant impact on population data and, ultimately, on the resources and funding available to communities.

Local Update of Census Addresses — LUCA

The Census Bureau is already planning for the 2030 Census, including testing operations in states such as Alabama and South Carolina. One of the most important operations leading up to the 2030 Census is the Local Update of Census Addresses, commonly referred to as LUCA.

I want to spend some time discussing LUCA because it is extremely important for local governments. Before I get into the details, I want to explain why having accurate population data matters.

The Project on Government Oversight, an organization based in Washington, D.C., recently examined federal funding coming into Texas. Looking at data from 2023, they determined that Texas received more than $152 billion in what is considered census-guided federal assistance. This includes federal funding associated with health care, transportation, infrastructure, and many other programs and services.

The important point is that federal funding is often distributed based on population data. If we do not have accurate population data, our communities could potentially receive less funding than they deserve. That is why making sure everyone, and every community is accurately represented is so important.

What Is LUCA?

LUCA is a voluntary, once-a-decade opportunity for local governments to review and update the Census Bureau's residential address list before the decennial Census. The Census Bureau uses this residential address list as part of its Master Address File for the 2030 Census.

Having accurate residential address information is critical. LUCA provides one of the most direct opportunities for local governments to help ensure that the Census Bureau's address information is accurate and complete. We know there are areas throughout the Rio Grande Valley that are growing rapidly. Local governments and staff work hard to maintain accurate address information, particularly through systems such as 9-1-1.

The Census Bureau can use 9-1-1 information, but it is specifically interested in residential addresses—not commercial addresses. This is another reason why maintaining accurate residential address information is so important. Unfortunately, participation in LUCA has historically been low.

Looking at the LUCA operation prior to the 2020 Census, which occurred around 2017, only about 20% of local governmental entities in Texas participated. We are here today to provide information and encourage local governments to participate as we prepare for 2030.

Hidalgo County Example

I want to share an example from Hidalgo County that demonstrates why LUCA can make a real difference. One of our partners, the Texas Census Institute, is a nonprofit organization that is also working to improve LUCA participation throughout the state.

Through their research, they identified an example in Hidalgo County where strong local participation and collaboration resulted in significant improvements to address data. Before the 2020 Census, community organizations reported that certain neighborhoods were not being adequately reached by 9-1-1 services. Those concerns were brought to the regional council responsible for maintaining the address information.

Local partners then offered to help update parcel and address information for areas such as Pueblo de Las Palmas. That updated address information was shared with Hidalgo County planning officials and ultimately incorporated into the county's LUCA submission.

There was fieldwork, collaboration, and coordination among local organizations and government officials to make sure the address information was accurate. As a result, when LUCA addresses in a sample area of Pueblo de Las Palmas were compared with the Census Bureau's existing address records, Hidalgo County had added 199 new addresses to its address file.

More than 70% of those 199 addresses were likely included in the Census enumeration because of the county's LUCA submission. That is a great example of how local efforts can make a real difference.

You know your communities better than anyone. You know where the new subdivisions are, where development is occurring, and where new residential areas are being established. That is why local participation in LUCA is so important.

2027–2028 LUCA Timeline

I want to make sure local leaders are aware of the upcoming timeline. Beginning in 2027, the highest elected officials of eligible governments including governors, county judges, and mayors will be invited to participate in LUCA. We anticipate that the Census Bureau's letters and notifications will be sent sometime around late April or early May of 2027. Once a mayor or county judge receives the notification, they can designate a liaison to participate in the process. That individual could be a planner, GIS professional, or another staff member with the appropriate knowledge and technical skills.

The designated liaison will be able to access the Census Bureau's address inventory and review the residential addresses listed for their jurisdiction. This will give local governments an opportunity to identify missing subdivisions, residential developments, unincorporated areas, or other addresses that may not be included in the Census Bureau's records.

There will be a pre-planning period during which local governments can gather their information and prepare their submissions. The formal LUCA submission period is expected to take place from October 2027 through March 2028, with March 31, 2028, serving as the deadline for final submissions. LUCA is voluntary, but we strongly encourage local governments throughout the Rio Grande Valley to participate.

Support and Next Steps

The Census Bureau also has a dedicated 2030 LUCA website that provides technical information and resources for local governments and staff. At the Texas Demographic Center, we are also looking at ways to coordinate training sessions and webinars. We want to work with our partners at the state level and with Councils of Governments to provide as much assistance as possible to communities that want to participate.

Our goal is to make sure local leaders understand the importance of this process and have the tools and information they need to participate successfully. I know you all have many important items to cover today, so I will conclude by simply saying thank you for the opportunity to be here. It has been a pleasure and an honor to speak with you, especially as someone who was born and raised in the Rio Grande Valley. Thank you for your time, your partnership, and your continued commitment to making sure our communities are accurately represented and receive the resources they need.

4.2. Consideration and ACTION to approve a Washington Cooperative Contract Usage Agreement with state of Washington Department of Enterprise Services and Authorize the Executive Director to Execute the Agreement. This would provide another valuable tool in our toolbox, giving us an additional resource to utilize when purchasing equipment such as buses and other necessary assets. ***Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve the Washington Cooperative Contract Usage Agreement with state of Washington Department of Enterprise Services and Authorize the Executive Director to Execute the Agreement. Mr. Paul Hernandez seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***

4.3. Consideration and ACTION to approve an Interlocal Agreement with the Harris County Department of Education for participation in the Choice Partners Cooperative Purchasing and Authorize the Execute Director to Execute the Agreement. This action item is for the same purpose as previous item. ***Commissioner Eduard Gonzales made a motion to approve Interlocal Agreement with the Harris County Department of Education for participation in the Choice Partners Cooperative Purchasing and Authorize the Execute Director to Execute the Agreement. Mr. Andres Chavez seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***

4.4. Consideration and ACTION approve Resolution #2026-19 Authorizing the LRGVDC Executive Director to Execute a resolution appointing and alternate, Crystal Balboa. Director to the Rio Garnde Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization Transportation Policy Board. While this is not based on the RGVMPO's bylaws and is not necessarily required, we want to ensure we have coverage. Also, situations do arise when either Mr. Dominguez or I may not be available. We want to ensure that we have three representatives in place so that at least one of them can represent the LRGVDC as a non-voting member on the MPO Policy Board. ***Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve Resolution #2026-19 Authorizing the LRGVDC Executive Director to Execute a resolution appointing and alternate, Crystal Balboa. Director to the Rio Grande Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization Transportation Policy Board, Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***

B. Executive Director Reports – Mr. Cruz started off with the following

1. Introducing all New Staff Members. Mr. Cruz introduced all new staff members. Mr. Cruz then moved on to two.

2. 2027 LRGVDC State of the COG Address: Event Announcement and Regional Recognition Award Nomination Process. I want to make everyone aware and formally invite you to the State of the COG Address. We have already begun working on event and this year's event will be held on January 7, 2027, from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. We will once again be hosting the event at the Knapp Medical Center, since we have outgrown the capacity of our current facility and can no longer accommodate the number of attendees we expect. We were very pleased with the increased participation last year, and we hope to see that continued growth this year. I also want to announce that, as part of the State of the COG Address, we will once again be soliciting nominations for our Regionalism Award. We are asking each of the three counties to submit one nomination for a well-recognized individual from their respective city or county who has demonstrated a strong commitment to regionalism and the work of the LRGVDC.

Each county may submit one individual. The nominations will be reviewed, and we will select the candidate who best meets the qualifications and demonstrates a meaningful connection to the LRGVDC and regionalism. The selected individual will then be recognized and presented with the Regionalism Award during the event. This is also a great opportunity for us to strengthen our connections with city and county staff and elected officials. It helps introduce the LRGVDC to individuals who may not be familiar with everything we do, and it allows us to continue building awareness of the services and resources we provide throughout the region. In many ways, it is an opportunity for us to showcase the LRGVDC and the important work we do across the Rio Grande Valley.

Updates on regional News, Funding Opportunities, Training and Legislation: Mr. Cruz mentioned that the remainder of my report was provided to you in advance.

Item #5 Department Reports

A. Community & Economic Development – Ms. Melisa Gonzales-Rosas started off with her action items on the Agenda.

1. Consideration and ACTION to approve Memoranda of Agreement (MOA) for the Air Quality Program between LRGVDC and the City of San Benito. ***Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve Memoranda of Agreement (MOA) for the Air Quality Program between LRGVDC and the City of San Benito, Mr. Paul Hernandez seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***

2. Consideration and ACTION to Approve Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the Air Quality Program between LRGVDC and the Delta Lake Irrigation District. ***Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the Air Quality Program between LRGVDC and the Delta Lake Irrigation District. Mr. Paul Hernandez seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion carried unanimously.***

Status Reports: Melisa Gonzalez-Rosas had a couple of announcements. First, I just want to remind everyone that if your city has not yet adopted our Regional Tire Ordinance, I strongly encourage you to consider doing so. We will also begin reaching out to your solid waste representatives to encourage adoption and help provide any information or assistance they may need.

Second, I want to remind everyone that if you have any upcoming community events, please let us know. We have a great outreach team member who enjoys being out in the community and promoting the work and services of the LRGVDC. We would be happy to participate in your events and help promote our organization and the

resources we have available to your communities. So, please don't hesitate to reach out and let us know about any upcoming events. I also want to add a quick comment regarding LUCA and what Ms. Cruz was discussing earlier.

I was with the City of Alamo when we began working through this process back in 2010, and I can tell you that it does require quite a bit of work. However, it is extremely important. If new subdivisions and developments are not included in the Census address system, they may not be counted. Ultimately, it is up to our local governments and our planning staff to make sure that any new subdivisions, developments, and residential areas within our jurisdictions are properly submitted through the LUCA process.

I strongly encourage our planners and local staff to stay involved and make sure this information is updated. By doing so, we can help the Census Bureau maintain accurate information and, most importantly, ensure that our communities receive an accurate population count.

Lastly, I would like to take a moment to present a special recognition award to Luke in appreciation of his contributions to the LRGVDC. Luke joined us as an intern in February and worked with us through the end of June. During his time here, he was tasked with putting together our full application for the South Texas Clean Cities Coalition. This was a significant undertaking, and Luke worked diligently to bring the application to the finish line.

Although we are still awaiting a response from the Department of Energy regarding any potential corrections or revisions, Luke has completed his internship with us, and I am truly grateful for all the hard work and dedication he contributed to this project. I am sad to see him go, but before we do, I want to take this opportunity to recognize him and thank him for everything he has done for our organization.

Mayor and Mr. Cruz, I would like to invite you to come forward so we can present Luke with this award and take a picture together. Luke, on behalf of the LRGVDC, please accept this award as a small token of our appreciation for your hard work, commitment, and contributions. We truly appreciate everything you have done for us. I had hoped to include the new South Texas Clean Cities Coalition logo on the award, which you designed, but we will have to wait until the Department of Energy approves it.

Thank you again, Luke, for your outstanding work. We wish you the very best in your future endeavors.

B. Health & Human Services Ms. Margarita Lopez started off with Action items she had on agenda.

1. Consideration and ACTION to approve the continued services of Maria Connie Garza as Chairperson and Kendra Stine as Vice Chairperson of the Citizens Advisory council, in accordance with Article VI (Officers) and Article V, Section 4 of the Rules of function. ***Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve the continued services of Maria Connie Garza as Chairperson and Kendra Stine as Vice Chairperson of the Citizens Advisory council, in accordance with Article VI (Officers) and Article V, Section 4 of the Rules of function, Mr. Troy Allen seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***

2. Consideration and ACTION to approve an Amendment to Article VI (officers) of the Citizens Advisory Council Rules of function to change the term of office for the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson from one (1) year to two (2) years. ***Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve an Amendment to Article VI (officers) of the Citizens Advisory Council Rules of function to change the term of office for the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson from one (1) year to two (2) years. Mr. Troy Allen seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***

Status Reports: I have several important updates to share with everyone today.

First, our Regional Area Plan for 2027–2029. Tomorrow marks the kickoff of our new Regional Area Plan for 2027 through 2029. The plan was approved without any corrections, and I want to extend my sincere gratitude on behalf of our entire team and the communities we serve throughout Willacy, Hidalgo, and Cameron counties. We appreciate everyone's support and collaboration, and we are excited to begin implementing the plan tomorrow.

Second, our Annual Vet Fest. This year, Vet Fest is coming to Mission! I want to extend a special thank-you to Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza for helping us locate and secure access to Leo Peña Placita Park, which will serve as our venue. The event will take place on November 12, from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

We have already gathered a variety of items to distribute to veterans and their caregivers, including individual space heaters, blankets, flashlights, solar-powered banks, fans, and 72-hour emergency preparedness backpacks. We will also be providing caregiver kits that include Amazon Echo devices, commonly known as Alexas, as well as indoor and outdoor smart battery-powered cameras, smart plug packs, gun-cleaning mats, weapon cable locks, and other items we are continuing to collect for the event. As always, Vet Fest will include food and a variety of community services and resources—not only for our veterans but also for their caregivers. Our goal is to ensure that veterans and their families have access to the support, supplies, and information they need.

Third, Medicare Open Enrollment. This is one of the most important updates I want to emphasize. Medicare Open Enrollment runs from October 15 through December 7.

During this period, individuals enrolled in Medicare have the opportunity to review their current coverage and make changes to their plans to ensure their benefits meet their needs for the upcoming year. We strongly encourage everyone to schedule an appointment with our Benefit Counseling Department during this enrollment period. Once the December 7 deadline passes, individuals may have limited opportunities to make changes, depending on their circumstances and eligibility for other enrollment periods. Our Benefit Counseling Department provides services that are completely free and unbiased. Our counselors help individuals understand their options so they can make informed decisions about their Medicare coverage. It is especially important that our older adults receive reliable guidance when choosing their plans. Without the proper information, individuals may enroll in coverage that does not adequately meet their needs.

For that reason, we encourage you to share this information with your constituents, family members, and anyone else who may benefit from these services. Please encourage them to schedule an appointment with our team.

Fourth, advanced directives and emergency preparedness. We are also promoting an initiative to encourage everyone involved in emergency preparedness planning to incorporate advance directives into their preparations.

When we think about emergency preparedness, we often focus on essential supplies such as water, food, and other necessities. However, it is equally important to ensure that our personal and medical wishes are documented and accessible in the event of an emergency. You will find additional information about advance directives in the black information packets provided to you today. These materials explain the types of advanced directives our Benefit Counseling Department can assist individuals with preparing.

Once again, these services are provided free of charge, and our department also offers free notarization of these documents. I encourage each of you to share this information with your communities and help raise awareness about the importance of having these documents prepared before an emergency occurs.

Finally, as part of our emergency preparedness initiative, each of you has received a solar power bank in the white box provided. This device can help keep your essential electronics powered during an emergency and also functions as a flashlight. We hope these resources will be useful to you and serve as a reminder that emergency preparedness involves more than supplies alone. It also means planning ahead, knowing what resources are available, and ensuring that we and our families are prepared.

Mayor from San Benito then had a question for Ms. Lopez, I noticed that an additional 72 residents were assisted. Could you please clarify if that number is for the current fiscal year? Ms. Lopez responds that is just for the month. Ms. Lopez then continued with the Raffle.

Jim Darling then had a few words; I've been involved with AAA for a long time, and under your leadership, even though some difficult times with federal reimbursements, you have continued to do an outstanding job serving our older adults. Thank you very much for all that you do. There are a few of us in the room who may be seeing you again soon, Ms. Lopez had a few words, I also want to thank you for two important lessons you taught me when I first came on board. You may not remember, but I certainly do. During my first year, you told me, Margarita, it's okay to relax when conducting business. You don't always have to be so serious. You can smile and relax. I've carried that advice with me. The second lesson came during a conversation about the challenges facing the Older Americans Act and the services we provide. As we discussed how to navigate those challenges and work with everyone involved, Mr. Darling said something that has always stayed with me: Just remember, we don't take political sides; we stand by what's right. Thank you both for the leadership, guidance, and lessons you've shared. They have made a lasting impression on me.

C. Public Safety

C.1.A. Emergency Services, Criminal Justice & Homeland Security – Mr. Cesar Merla started off with his 4 action items on the Agenda. All Board Members decided to do all at once and then vote after.

1. Consideration and ACTION to Approve Resolution for FY 2027-28 Non-Profit Security Grant application titled regional Planning and Security.

2. Consideration and ACTION to approve Resolution for FY 2027-28 Homeland Security program Grant application titled Regional Planning.

3. Consideration and ACTION to approve Resolution for FY 2027-28 State Homeland Security program Grant Application titled Regional Fire Academy Training Coordinator.

4. Consideration and ACTION to approve resolution for FY 2027-28 Criminal Justice Assistance Program Grant Application titled regional Criminal Justice Planning and Assistance. ***Commissioner Ellie Torres approves all 4 action items above; Mr. Andres Chavez seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***

Status Reports: Mr. Cesar Merla started off with Our Criminal Justice and Homeland Security Program continues to serve the region and monitor grant activity. The additional report before you provides a brief update on the pending mutual aid agreements that have been distributed to all jurisdictions. As of the date listed in the report, September 18, additional cities have already signed the agreements, while others have placed them on their meeting agendas for consideration.

This report is being provided for informational purposes only. On Monday, our internal staff will send out additional reminders encouraging jurisdictions to submit their agreements. We intentionally did not establish a strict deadline because we understand that some jurisdictions may need additional time to review the agreements and conduct their due diligence. We encourage that process and want each jurisdiction to feel comfortable with its participation. As long as we continue to make progress, we are in good shape.

C.1.B. Rio Grande Valley Emergency Communication District – Mr. Cesar Merla stated that Our Addressing Division continues to serve the region, focusing on Hidalgo and Willacy counties while also addressing new developments and residential areas within those counties. We remain on track to conduct our internal audit and will continue reaching out to all jurisdictions regularly to ensure we are capturing new addresses and newly developed residential areas. There is an established process for coordinating information between our internal staff and the planning departments of each city and county. However, we also conduct additional checks to ensure accuracy. Occasionally, a developer may begin a project without immediately notifying the appropriate departments, so we do our best to stay ahead of new developments and ensure that all addresses are properly accounted for.

Our IT Division also has a standard report to share. Yesterday, we conducted audits of all backup generators at our Public Safety Answering Points. All generators are scheduled to be refueled by the end of today and tomorrow to ensure they are ready to support continued operations in the event of a power outage at any of these locations. This preparation helps ensure that emergency services can continue operating when they are needed most. We are also preparing for the upcoming weather. In my opinion, the Rio Grande Valley is one of the most resilient regions when it comes to responding to these challenges, and we are taking the necessary steps to ensure we are ready. Our Public Education team has also been very active over the past couple of months and continues to move forward with its outreach efforts. As you can see in the report before you, the team has provided a comprehensive list of completed activities, along with upcoming events and initiatives scheduled for the next several weeks.

Finally, our upcoming Public Safety and Emergency Communications Conference will take place at the South Padre Island Convention Centre. I would like to extend a special thank you to Judge Guerra for participating and to Councilwoman Hartwell for joining us as a special guest during the opening ceremonies. The conference will include a half-day program, and we will also have a special boat tour scheduled for the evening of Wednesday, October 14. If you are interested in participating, please let us know so we can reserve your spot. We look forward to seeing everyone there!

C.2 Lower Rio Grande Police Academy Program- Mr. Solis stated that he would be going through all the Action items he had on Agenda and get them all approved at once.

1. Consideration and ACTION to approve the renewal of an Interlocal Agreement between the City of Alton, Texas and LRGV Academy for the Purpose of reporting training for Alton Police Department.

2. Consideration and ACTION to approve the renewal of an Interlocal Agreement between the County of Hidalgo, Texas and the LRGV Academy for the purpose of reporting training for the Hidalgo County Constable Precinct 2 office.

3. Consideration and ACTION to approve the renewal of an Interlocal Agreement between the LRGV Academy and the City of La Joya, Texas for the usage of La Joya Police Department's shooting Range.

4. Consideration and ACTION to approve the renewal of an Interlocal Between the LRGV Academy and the City of Donna, Texas for the usage of the Donna Police Department's shooting Range.

Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve all 4 action items above; Mr. Paul Hernandez seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.

Status Reports: Mr. Solis started off with, During the past month, we conducted five in-service training courses for local police departments, serving a total of 61 students and providing 736 contact hours of instruction.

Last month, we also launched our newest Police Academy in partnership with the Mission Police Department. That academy is currently in session. We are also approaching the completion of our Rio Grande City Police Academy, with graduation expected in November. The cadets are now in the final phase of their training, with firearms training scheduled for next week. They are getting close to completing the program and preparing to serve in the field.

In addition, we are currently accepting applications and conducting entrance exams and physical fitness assessments for our next academies, which are scheduled to begin in January. We are working to build a strong pool of qualified candidates for both upcoming academies.

Finally, I have spoken with Mr. Cruz about an exciting initiative that we hope to share with you in the next month to six weeks. We are working on creating opportunities for high school students to establish a pathway into law enforcement. We look forward to bringing you more information soon and sharing how this initiative can help prepare the next generation of law enforcement professionals.

D. Transportation Valley Metro - Mr. Rene Garza started off with all action items on agenda.

1. Consideration and ACTION to approve Software Subscription Renewal for LRGVDC Valley Metro of the Genfare LLC, software subscription to maintain continued access to fare-collection date, reporting, system management and related services. This is for the annual renewal of our Genfer software collection for an additional year, in the amount of $34,709.

2. Consideration and ACTION to approve the repair of UNIT 2203, exceeding procurement threshold.

3. Consideration and ACTION to Authorize LRGVDC Valley Metro's participation as a partner with Hidalgo County Community Service Agency (HCCSA) in its Community Rides Grant application for funding of up to $100,000 including authorization to Execute a Letter of Commitment.

Commissioner Edward Gonzalez made a motion to approve all 3 Valley Metro Action items; Commissioner Ellie Torres seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.

Status Reports: We closed out the fiscal year with a total ridership of 914,607 passengers, representing an increase of just over 34% compared to the previous fiscal year. We came very close to reaching one million passengers! With your continued support, encouragement, and help in educating our citizens about the services we provide, we hope to continue to increase our ridership. Our service covers the entire five to six county region, extending all the way to Laredo. With everyone's continued efforts, we are hopeful that we will reach one million passengers by the next fiscal year.

Rio Grande Valley MPO – No reports at this time.

Item #6: New & Unfinished Business - Jim Darling expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to work alongside the region's outstanding leaders over the years. He reflected on the value of learning and growing together, noting that it had been a privilege to serve and lead in such a wonderful region. He also shared his gratitude for everyone's contributions and support, emphasizing that he will always cherish the many great memories he has made throughout his time working with the organization.

Item #7 Adjourn - President called meeting at 1:05 pm

President Judge Aurelio Guerra

ATTEST :

Liza Alfaro, Recording Secretary