

MINUTES

MEETING OF THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL BOARD OF DIRECTORS, GENERAL MEMEBRSHIP, & LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY COUNCIL CORPORATION MEETING

12:00PM Wednesday January 28, 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: Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza

Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza called the meeting to order at 12:01 p.m. Roll Call was taken, and as of 12:10 p.m. quorum was attained.

Present: Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza

Judge Aurelio Guerra, Willacy County
Commissioner Nurith Galonsky, City of Brownsville
Mayor Omar Ochoa, City of Edinburg
Commissioner Frank Morales, City of Harlingen
Commissioner Joey Lopez, Cameron County
Commissioner Ellie Torres, Hidalgo County
Mayor Rosa Perez, City of La Villa
Mayor Pro-Tem Alberto Escobedo, City of Los Fresnos
Commissioner Pepe Cabeza de Vaca, City of McAllen
Mayor Gilbert Gonzales, City of Raymondville
Mayor Rick Guerra, City of San Benito
Mr. Ron Garza, UTRGV
Mr. Paul Hernandez, South Texas College
Mr. Luke Lucio, TSTC
Mr. Troy Allen, Delta Lake
Mr. Ernesto Cavazos, Willacy Co, Navigation District
Mr. Jim Darling, Member-at-Large
Mr. Andres Chavez, Member-at-Large
Ms. Lupita Sanchez Martinez, Grassroots Org

Absent:

Mayor Adrian Gonzalez, City of Weslaco
Mayor David Moreno, City of Donna
Mayor Sylvia Castillo, City of Sullivan City
Mayor Oscar Montoya, City of Mercedes
Mayor Ambrosio Hernandez City of Pharr
Commissioner Marco Villegas, City of San Juan
Mr. Oscar Garcia, Member-at-Large

Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza moved on to Item#2

Item #2:1. Consideration and ACTION for approval of Annual Elections Meeting Minutes May 28, 2025. **Ms. Lupita Sanchez made a motion to approve the minutes for May 28, 2025; Mayor Ricardo Guerra seconded the motion; upon a vote, the motion carried unanimously.**

2.2. Consideration and Action to approve minutes for Board of Directors Meeting on December 18, 2025. **Mr. Troy Allen made a motion to approve meeting minutes for December 18, 2025, Mayor Ricardo Guerra seconded the motion; upon a vote, the motion was carried unanimously.**

Item #3: Public Comment – No public Comment

Item #4: Administration - Mr. Cruz started off with before moving on to the next action item, staff provided a brief debrief and expressed appreciation to the Board for their participation and support of the State of the COG Address held earlier in January. The event was well attended, with approximately 160 participants in attendance, reflecting strong engagement and interest in the work of the organization.

The Board was also informed of the LRGVDC Regional Recognition Award, for which three nominees were solicited from each county. The 2026 award recipients included Ms. Jacqueline Moya (Cameron County – Los Fresnos), Ms. Barbara Jean Garza (Hidalgo County – Weslaco), and Mr. Ernesto “Lefty” Cavazos (Willacy County), who is also a new Board member representing the Willacy County Navigation District.

Congratulations were extended to all award recipients, and the Board was advised that nominations for the LRGVDC Regional Recognition Award will again be accepted next year to honor individuals who demonstrate leadership, take on new responsibilities, and serve as champions for the region.

1. Consideration and General Membership ACTION to approve FY 2026 Annual Report & Budget. Mr. Cruz started off with the Annual Report provides the general membership, Board of Directors, and the public with a comprehensive overview of the LRGVDC’s organizational structure and programmatic responsibilities. It outlines the Council’s 2026 performance goals and proposed budget, along with productivity outcomes for FY 2025.

The proposed 2026 annual budget totals **\$4,227,006**, reflecting an increase of just over **\$2.6 million** from the 2025 budget due to additional funding awarded by agencies such as the RGV 911 District, Federal Transit Administration, TxDOT, Texas Water Development Board, and TCEQ Water Quality. The 2026 budget does not include an increase in membership dues.

The fringe benefit rate for 2026 is **52.60%**, representing a **2.51% increase** from the 2025 rate of 50.09%. Total budget expenditures reflect an indirect cost rate of **9.16%**, consistent with revised state guidance. Under the updated calculation method, this represents a **2.46% decrease** from the 2025 indirect rate of 11.59%. In accordance with Texas Local Government Code, Section 391.0115(e), regional planning commissions may not exceed 15% of total expenditures, excluding capital expenditures and pass-through subcontracted funds.

This report would not have been possible without the dedication and service of the Council’s administration, finance department, and program management staff. I would also like to thank the Board of Directors for their continued support and leadership in guiding the Council’s financial operations in a responsible and forward-looking manner. The comprehensive FY 2026 Annual Budget for the LRGVDC is hereby presented and recommended by the Budget Committee for approval.

2. Consideration and ACTION to adopt FY 2026 Annual Investment report and Accept Quarterly Investment. Crystal states that the annual and quarterly reports have been provided in your packets. If there are no questions, this item requires board action. **Mr. Ron Garza made a motion to Adopt FY 2026 Annual Investment report & Accept Quarterly Investment; Mr. Paul Rodriguez seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.**

B. Executive Directors Report. Mr. Cruz introduced all new and all Promotions that were brought in. Mr. Cruz started off with, I would like to introduce new and promoted staff. I would like to inform the Board that, as of December, we welcomed a new director. Ms. Sandra Carrizales is serving as the Interim Director for Valley Metro. She has over 15 years of experience in transportation, and we are pleased to have her on board. Ms. Carrizales is with us today. Mr. Cruz then went on to introduce all Promotions & New Hires. Mr. Cruz then moved on to updates on Regional News, Funding Opportunities, Training and Legislative Items.

First, I would like to take the opportunity to introduce a guest who recently met with us and will be presenting to the Board. Mr. Christopher Hartley is with the USDA and serves as a Senior Advisor. We had a brief meeting with him yesterday. Without getting ahead of his presentation, he will be discussing potential funding opportunities related to water—an issue of significant concern at this time due to current shortages. Whether funding is available or not, his insights will be valuable. With that, I would like to invite Mr. Hartley to present to the Board. Mr. Chris Hartley then started off with Thank you very much, Executive Director, and thank you to the members of the Board for welcoming me this morning. As mentioned, I serve as a Senior Advisor to the USDA, where my work includes engagement on the 1944 Water Treaty with Mexico, as well as a secondary project spanning the Lower Rio Grande Valley and extending into the upper reaches of Region M. This work focuses on water use efficiency and water conveyance.

Over the past several months, I have had the opportunity to meet with numerous irrigation districts, agricultural stakeholders, water agencies, and other partners throughout the region. I am very interested in continuing my engagement with the Regional Development Corporation, as well as with cities, agencies, and stakeholders across the Lower Rio Grande Valley. My current effort is focused on developing an initial assessment of water availability, system losses, and opportunities for future investment in the Valley. I recognize that there are several existing structures already actively engaged in water-related efforts. We have reached out to many of these entities at the federal, state, and local levels, as well as to less formal stakeholder groups. Over the next month or two, my goal is to complete this initial assessment, identify the areas with the greatest investment potential, and explore possible funding sources to support those opportunities.

Many of you may already be familiar with the proposed NAD Bank investment totaling \$400 million—\$200 million for the Texas side of the border and \$200 million for New Mexico. These funds are beginning to roll out. I met with NAD Bank again this morning, and we are working to coordinate efforts not only with them, but also with the Texas Water Development Board. We also hope to bring several additional partners to the table in the coming months. Ultimately, our goal is greater collaboration and a coordinated regional voice. If you have any questions, I would be happy to address them. If not, my contact information has been provided to the Board, and I encourage you to reach out.

Lastly, Mr. Cruz mentioned, I would like to remind everyone of an upcoming event scheduled for next month, on February 25, which also coincides with our next Board of Directors meeting. On that day, the LRGVDC will be hosting a tree planting event. As you may recall, we successfully applied for and received a small grant from H-E-B, which will allow us to plant trees in and around the LRGVDC main office.

The tree planting will take place on February 25 between 9:00 and 10:00 a.m., prior to the Board meeting. It will be a full morning of activities, and we look forward to everyone's participation.

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

Item #5 Department Reports

A. Community & Economic Development

1. Consideration and ACTION to approve a Resolution Adopting the Rio Grande Valley Broadband & Digital Opportunity Plan (RGVBDO) as the official framework for advancing broadband infrastructure and digital equity in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. For those who may not be familiar, we do have an RGV Digital Broadband Coalition. If you have not yet joined our efforts, I invite all of you to participate. **Mr. Paul Hernandez made a motion to approve resolution Adopting the Rio Grande Valley Broadband**

& Digital Opportunity Plan (RGVBDO) as the official framework for advancing broadband infrastructure and digital equity in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Mr. Albert Escobedo seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.

2. Consideration and ACTION to approve South Texas Clean Cities & Communities Coalition (STC4) Elections of officers for 2026. As per the RSCC Bylaws, the Advisory Committee shall consist of Chair, Vice Chair & Vice Chair Elect. **Mr. Ron Garza made a motion to approve south Texas Clean Cities Coalition (STC4) elections of officers for 2026. Ms. Lupita Sanchez Martinez seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.**

Program Status Reports: The Solid Waste Request for Applications is currently open. If your organization is interested in applying for solid waste funding, now is the time to do so. The deadline to submit RFAs is February 13 at noon, and all applications must be received by that time. If you have any questions regarding the open RFAs, please contact either myself or Brenda Salinas.

We are also working with Chris to coordinate either a regional stakeholder's workshop or a series of virtual meetings to gather the information he needs to ensure we receive high-quality data for our region. This information impacts everyone, so your participation is important. Please be on the lookout for emails or calendar invitations from our office, as we look forward to hearing from stakeholders across the region.

Finally, I would like to share that the Region M Plan for our area has been approved by the state. If you have not yet reviewed the updated plan, it will be distributed to stakeholders and is also currently available on our website. Should you have any questions regarding the new Regional Water Plan, including water conservation, drought contingency, or rate-related assistance, please feel free to contact us.

No further questions Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza moved on to next item.

B. Health and Human Services

Ms. Margarita Lopez had one action item on the agenda.

1. Consideration and ACTION to approve the following Membership Application for the Citizens Advisory Council. Dr. Mary Young Lee is being recommended for appointment to represent Cameron County under the Other category. The appointment will be for a three-year term in accordance with the Citizen Advisory Council Rules of Function, Article V, Membership, Section 4. Dr. Lee holds a Ph.D. and is an Associate Professor at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, School of Public Health. Her expertise is in epidemiology and healthy aging. Her professional work focuses on promoting quality of life, independence, and fall prevention among older adults, including translating scientific evidence to support community decision-making. Dr. Lee seeks to contribute to the Citizen Advisory Council through grant development and evidence-based recommendations that address local aging-related needs. **Commissioner Joey Lopez made a motion to approve the following Membership Application for the Citizens Advisory Council. Mr. Jim Darling seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.**

Program Status Reports: I have two announcements. First, we will be hosting our LiiFE Conference this year on March 27, once again here at our usual location. This year's conference will focus on technology and artificial intelligence as support tools for caregivers. The agenda will include hands-on sessions designed to help caregivers navigate medical portals, order prescriptions online, and better understand what AI can and cannot do. We will also address concerns around technology use, including fraud prevention, to ensure caregivers feel confident using these tools safely and effectively.

Second, I am pleased to share that we have reinstated services that were previously on hold, including residential repairs and health maintenance assistance. Over the next two quarters, we anticipate serving approximately 1,012 individuals, supported by \$1,154,000 in funding. All services are now fully operational and underway.

No Further questions Mayor Norie Gonzalez Garza moved on to the next item.

C. Public Safety

C.1.A Emergency Services Criminal Justice & Homeland Security

Mr. Cesar Merla with the Board's permission, I will begin by reviewing the four action items on the docket and would like to approve all at same time.

1. Consideration and ACTION to approve Resolution for FY 2026-2027 Non-profit Security Grant Application Titled Regional Planning and Security.
2. Consideration and ACTION to approve Resolution for FY 2026-2027 State Homeland Security Program Grant Application Titled Regional Planning.
3. Consideration and ACTION to approve Resolution for FY 2026-2027 State Homeland Security Grant Application Titled Regional Fire Academy Training Coordinator.
4. Consideration and ACTION to approve Resolution for FY 2026-2027 Criminal Justice Assistance Grant Application Titled Regional Criminal Justice Planning and Assistance.

Commissioner Pepe Cabeza de Vaca made a motion to approve all action items from 1-4, Commissioner Ellie Torres seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.

Program Status Reports: The current Requests for Funding Applications (RFAs) for criminal justice remain open. All submissions are due by 5:00 p.m. on February 12. Jurisdictions or entities, whether public service or nonprofit, must submit their applications to the Governor's Office by that deadline.

Regarding homeland security funding at the state level, we are still awaiting certain federal-level resolutions. We continue to monitor these funding sources and will notify the Board and all relevant agencies as soon as funding becomes available.

Additionally, our Criminal Justice Division will be hosting a Crisis Leadership Training course on February 4, from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. This four-hour training is open to interested participants. We recommend attendance by mid-level personnel, such as an assistant chief of police or assistant fire chief, rather than top-level leadership, to ensure practical benefit for responding entities. Telecommunicators from your city are also welcome to attend this training. While it takes place during the day, the four-hour session is highly valuable and well worth the time.

C. 1B Rio Grande Valley Emergency Communication District.

Program Status Reports: I would like to highlight a few key points regarding our ongoing regional services. In 2025, we saw 20% growth, responding to over 3,000 tickets addressing various needs across the region. This number continues to increase. Our IT division provided full support throughout the recent Verizon outage earlier this month, ensuring there was no lapse in coverage and maintaining strong support for our public safety answering points.

Additionally, our Public Education Division continues to expand awareness of 9-1-1 services and resources, particularly in rural areas, ensuring the region remains well-served. Mr. Cruz then provided an update regarding FEMA Emergency Preparedness Grants. A decision on their release is expected by the end of this month. Previously, not all states received allocations due to administrative issues, which led to litigation affecting federal funding. This has delayed Homeland Security grants, including those that support local councils of governments. These funds are crucial for providing first responders with equipment and upgrades. We remain hopeful for a favorable outcome by month's end so that funding can move forward.

C.2. Police Academy Program

Program Status Reports: Sara Casares began by noting that there are no action items for this month, but she wanted to share announcements regarding upcoming training for law enforcement officers, current academy projects, and a few highlights.

Upcoming Training:

1. **Solo Officer Rapid Deployment (SWORD) Training** – February 5–6 in Weslaco.

This course is designed for officers responding to active attacks while in plainclothes.

Topics include solo response movements, drawing and engaging from concealed carry, medical intervention for victims, post-engagement procedures to prevent misidentification or friendly fire, and establishing family plans for off-duty encounters.

Recommended for officers in plainclothes assignments, including narcotics investigators, gang investigators, or any officer carrying a firearm off duty.

Training is offered free of charge, and registration assistance is available through the academy.

2. **Advanced Instructor Training** – February 9–13 in the CIEDO Boardroom at the COG.

This training is designed for instructors with a minimum of three years' TECOLE basic instructor certification.

The course focuses on public speaking, advanced course development, curriculum delivery, and utilizing technology to engage learners.

Training is free of charge, and registration assistance is available through the academy.

Additional trainings in March include Special Investigative Topics, Intermediate Child Abuse Prevention, Intermediate Use of Force, and Cultural Diversity. All are free and can be accessed through the in-service calendar on the LRGVDC website.

Current Projects:

Academy Applications: We are accepting applications and testing for the Weslaco part-time and Rio Grande City full-time academies. Background investigations will begin in February, with both academies scheduled to launch in March.

Basic County Corrections Course: We have launched a marketing and recruitment campaign for this new course, including attending job expos and coordinating with school districts to introduce high school seniors to careers in law enforcement.

Highlights:

On January 23, we commenced the 232nd Academy class in collaboration with the Mission Police Department. These cadets will train for six months in preparation to serve as Texas peace officers in our region. We wish them every success in their training journey.

January Training Summary:

Total students: 14 - Course hours: 40

Contact hours: 328. The lower numbers reflect testing, background checks, and preparations for the 232nd Police Academy.

Board of Directors Meeting Minutes January 28, 2026

Valley Metro Transportation

1. Consideration and ACTION to approve the Updated Section 5310 Program Management Plan for LRGVDC Valley Metro. **Mr. Jim Darling made a motion to approve the updated Section 5310 Program Management Plan for LRGVDC Valley Metro. Mr. Troy Allen seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.**

2. Consideration and ACTION to approve Acquisition of Hardware for LRGVDC Valley Metro. **Mr. Jim Darling made a motion to approve the Acquisition of Hardware for LRGVDC Valley Metro. Commissioner Ellie Torres seconded the motion, upon a vote, the motion was carried unanimously.**

Program Status Reports: Finally, I would like to share an update on ridership and some upcoming initiatives. Year-to-date ridership stands at 409,195 riders. We are also preparing to update our Five-Year Regional Transportation Coordination Plan, which was last completed in 2021. KFH was selected through a competitive RFP process to develop this plan, which will serve as a roadmap for transportation services in the region. The plan will include short-term, mid-term, and long-term recommendations, along with performance measures to track progress over time. We expect to receive the completed plan early next year.

RGVMPO Program Status Reports:

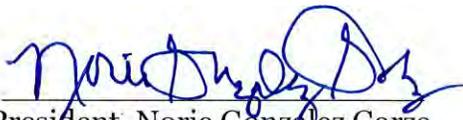
Mr. Medina was not present therefore no reports at this time for RGV MPO. Mr. Cruz mentioned that as a reminder, MPO meetings have been rescheduled and will now take place the week prior to our Board meetings. Additionally, beginning in 2026, MPO will be conducting "road trip" meetings, with sessions hosted in a different city each month. This is simply an update for the Board's awareness.

Item #6 Executive Session

1. Personal Matters under section 551-074 (1) to deliberate the appointment, employment, evaluation, reassignment, duties, discipline, or dismissal of a public officer or employee RE: Executive Director Annual Performance Evaluation.
2. Reconvene into an Open Session to consider ACTION, if any on items related to the Executive Session as described above. **Commissioner Ellie Torres made a motion to approve items related to the Executive Session as described above. Mr. Alberto Escobedo seconded the motion; upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.**

Item #7 New & Unfinished Business – None at this time

Item #8 Adjourn - Meeting was adjourned at 1:01PM


President, Norie Gonzalez Garza

ATTEST:


Liza Alfaro, Recording Secretary