

**Emerald Coast Regional Council
Meeting Minutes**

The Chautauqua Building
95 Circle Dr, DeFuniak Springs, FL 32435
May 20, 2026, 11:30am



Members Present:

Kurvin Qualls, Governor Appointee, Chair
Councilmember April Sutton, Mary Esther, Vice Chair
Councilmember Jim Bagby, Destin
Tanya Branton, FDOT
Mayor Bob Campbell, DeFuniak Springs
Commissioner Danny Glidewell, Walton Co
Mayor Pam Henderson, Callaway
Mayor Heather Lindsay, Milton
Elizabeth Orr, FLDEP (Virtual)
Commissioner Drew Palmer, Okaloosa Co (Virtual)
Commissioner Daniel Raffield, Bay County (Virtual)
Councilmember Bill Schaetzle, Niceville
Mayor JB Schluter, Gulf Breeze (Virtual)
Councilmember David Schmidt, Ft. Walton Beach (Virtual)
Commissioner Kerry Smith, Santa Rosa Co
J.D. Smith, Governor Appointee
Mayor JB Whitten, Crestview

Members Not Present:

Mayor Tracy Andrews, Chipley
Commissioner Steven Barry, Escambia Co.
Darryl Boudreau, NWFLWMD
Mayor Ben Boutwell, Century
Councilmember Paul Casto, Panama City Beach
Commissioner Doug Crosby, Bay County
Councilmember Casey Jones, Pensacola
Commissioner Carolyn Ketchel, Okaloosa Co
Commissioner Jack Griffis, Springfield
Commissioner Earl Stafford, Holmes County
Commissioner Josh Street, Panama City
Commissioner Steve Stroberger, Escambia Co
Commissioner Colten Wright, Santa Rosa Co

Others Present:

Jeff Abignail, Citizen (Virtual)
Joel Bradley, WarrenAverett (Virtual)
Macy Falcon, Kimley-Horn (Virtual)
Harold Griffin Jr, Ride ITL Cares (Virtual)
Cassidy Haney, FL Greenways & Trails (Virtual)
Lexi Harris, (Virtual)
Donnie Hicks, NWFL WMD

Dave Murzin, Town of Century
Terrence Nelson, Ride ITL Cares (Virtual)
Cory Wilkinson, HDR
Kandase Lee, ECRC
Dawn Schwartz, ECRC
Renee Quick, ECRC (Virtual)
Ada Clark, ECRC (Virtual)
Tiffany Bates, ECRC (Virtual)
Eric Christianson, ECRC (Virtual)
Rae Emary, ECRC
Gary Kramer, ECRC
Leandra Meredith, ECRC
Tammy Neal, ECRC
Jill Nobles, ECRC
Vacari Stevenson, ECRC (Virtual)
Jessica Walton, ECRC (Virtual)

Call to Order

Chair Qualls called the meeting to order.

Prayer and Pledge of Allegiance

The prayer was led by Councilmember Bagby, and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Roll Call and Recognition of Virtual Members and Attendees

Chair Qualls welcomed those in attendance and introductions were made.

Public Forum:

Chair Qualls opened the public forum. With no speakers or comments from the public, Chair Qualls closed the public forum.

Information Items

Item 1: Program Highlights

Kandase Lee, ECRC CEO, provided an update on ECRC's strategic initiatives, referencing the ECRC's "Seven Layer Cake" concept, reporting that the top four layers have been completed as promised, while the remaining three initiatives continue to advance. These include advancing the regional plan implementations, broadband and fiber deployment efforts, and deployment of the Regional Traffic Management Center.

Kandase Lee noted that the agenda included an amendment to the current FY 2025-2026 budget for additional ATMS Signalization Grant funding. She explained that the increased funding reflects anticipated growth and success in the upcoming work program years. She emphasized that the project would continue to advance, benefiting the Florida-Alabama Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) while also expanding its impact to other TPOs. The ongoing developments are expected to reshape the planning processes and influence how cities operate in the future.

Kandase Lee announced that ECRC has issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) associated with a recently awarded \$10 million federal demonstration grant. The effort seeks innovative proposals

for a geospatial ecosystem, digital twin operating, AI-implementation of crash prevention, and enhanced data management, analytics, and real-time operations.

Additionally, Kandase Lee highlighted ECRC's strong organizational performance and thanked the board and staff for their continued support.

Item 2: Regional Rural Transportation Plan Public Participation Plan

Rae Emary, Marketing & Outreach Coordinator, presented the updated draft Regional Rural Transportation Program (RRTP) Public Participation Plan for review and comment, explaining that the update includes revisions to reflect the RRTP's established brand identity, incorporation of additional planning strategies developed since adoption of the original plan, and general administrative updates including staff changes, contact information, and organizational details.

The public comment period opened on May 12, 2026, and will remain open through June 26, 2026. Comments may be submitted through the RRTP website or by email. Rae Emary noted that the updated plan will be brought to the August 27, 2026 meeting for Board approval and adoption.

No questions or comments were received.

Action Items:

Item 3: Approval of the February 18, 2026 Meeting Minutes

Chair Qualls asked for action on the February 18, 2026 meeting minutes.

J D Smith moved to approve the February 18, 2026 meeting minutes as presented. The motion was seconded by Mayor Henderson and was unanimously approved.

Item 4: Approval of January – March 2026 Financial Statements

Chair Qualls asked for action on the January – March 2026 financial statements.

Mayor Whitten moved to approve the January – March 2026 financial statements as presented. The motion was seconded by J D Smith and was unanimously approved.

Item 5: Presentation and Approval of the Independent Financial Audit FY2025

Joel Bradley, Audit Principal with WarrenAverett, presented the FY2025 Independent Financial Audit, reporting that ECRC received an unmodified opinion, commonly referred to as a clean audit opinion, representing the highest level of assurance available. He explained that the financial statements are fairly presented in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles.

Joel Bradley reviewed key financial trends and reported that while grant revenues declined due to the completion or delay of several major federal grants, overall financial performance remained strong and consistent. He stated that ECRC's financial metrics showed no signs of deteriorating financial condition and reflected a high level of fiscal responsibility.

Mayor Henderson commended staff and the Finance Department for maintaining strong financial controls and achieving another clean audit. Kandase Lee also recognized CFO Dawn Schwartz and the Finance Department for their efforts, noting that ECRC had recently completed multiple federal reviews and audits with no findings and several noteworthy practices identified.

Mayor Henderson moved to approve the independent financial audit FY2025. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Schaetzle and was unanimously approved.

Item 6: Approval of the Amended FY2025-2026 Annual Budget & Work Program

Dawn Schwartz, CFO, presented the proposed amendment to the FY2025-2026 Annual Budget and Work Program, explaining that the amendment adds \$625,000 in a State Joint Participation Agreement (JPA) funding for Advanced Transportation Management System (ATMS) signalization improvements. The corresponding expenditures are budgeted as equipment purchases.

Kandase Lee further explained that the amendment, combined with previously approved funding, results in approximately \$1.625 million in equipment purchases that will occur in the coming weeks. The equipment will be purchased through an approved Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) vendor and installed along Highway 98, Highway 90, and within the City of Pensacola to improve signal communications, signal coordination, and transportation system operations.

J D Smith moved to amend the FY2025-2026 Annual Budget and Work Program, including the addition of \$625,000 in State Joint Participation Agreement (JPA) funding for Advanced Transportation Management System (ATMS) signalization improvements. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Sutton and was unanimously approved.

Item 7: Resolution ECRC 2026-07, Approval and Adoption of the Regional Rural Transportation Plan Project Priorities FY2028-2032

Gary Kramer, Planner, presented the Regional Rural Transportation Plan (RRTP) Project Priorities for FY2028-2032 highlighting the geographical area covered by the RRTP and explained that the project priorities serve as guidance for the FDOT in developing its Five-Year Work Program.

In support of the Project Priorities, Leandra Meredith, Marketing and Outreach Coordinator, summarized the public outreach efforts that were conducted. Outreach activities included a public survey, virtual open house, interactive mapping tools, social media campaigns, email notifications, and coordination with local governments and community organizations.

Gary Kramer reported that the RRTP Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) met prior to the ECRC Board meeting and recommended approval of the project priorities.

Mayor Lindsay moved to approve Resolution ECRC 2026-07, adopting the Regional Rural Transportation Plan Project Priorities for FY2028-2032. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Sutton and was unanimously approved.

Item 8: Resolution ECRC 2026-08, Approval of IT Managed Services Firm

Kandase Lee explained that ECRC has outsourced IT services for several years due to increasing technological complexity and organizational needs. In an effort to ensure compliance with procurement requirements and secure the best value, ECRC issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for Managed IT Services.

Seven (7) proposals were received and evaluated by a selection committee consisting of Kandase Lee (ECRC), Dawn Schwartz (ECRC), Renee Quick (ECRC), and Jared Cobb (City of Mary Esther). Kandase Lee noted that the City of Mary Esther recently completed an IT services procurement,

during which City Manager Jared Cobb played a significant role, providing him with valuable experience in IT procurement.

Following the evaluation of qualifications, technical abilities, service approach, regional presence, and cost considerations, the committee ranked the firms as follows:

1. Bit-Wizards
2. Consultadd
3. SoftSages

Kandase Lee requested the board's authorization to negotiate and execute a contract with Bit-Wizards, with the authority to proceed to the next-ranked firm if negotiations were unsuccessful.

Board members discussed the evaluation process, selection criteria, and the firm's prior experience. Kandase Lee confirmed that Bit-Wizards is ECRC's current IT provider and has served in that role since IT services were outsourced.

Mayor Henderson moved to approve Resolution ECRC 2026-08, approving the selection committee's recommendation for Information Technology (IT) Managed Services and authorizing the CEO to negotiate and execute a contract for professional services for the Information Technology (IT) Managed Services for the term of July 1, 2026 – September 30, 2027, with two 1-year renewal options; if negotiations fail, staff should proceed to negotiate with the next-ranked firm. The motion was seconded by Mayor Lindsay and was unanimously approved.

Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:15pm.

Duly passed and approved by the Emerald Coast Regional Council on this 27th day of August, 2026.

By: 
Kurvin Qualls, ECRC Chair

Date: 27 Aug 2026