Emerald Coast Regional Council
Meeting Minutes
The Chautauqua Building
95 Circle Dr, DeFuniak Springs, FL 32435
August 27, 2026, 11:30am

Members Present:
Kurvin Qualls, Governor Appointee, Chair
Councilmember April Sutton, Mary Esther, Vice Chair
Mayor Tracy Andrews, Chipley
Darryl Boudreau, NWFLWMD
Mayor Ben Boutwell, Century
Mayor Bob Campbell, DeFuniak Springs
Councilmember Paul Casto, Panama City Beach (Virtual)
Commissioner Doug Crosby, Bay County (Virtual)
Mayor Pamn Henderson, Callaway (Virtual)
Mayor Heather Lindsay, Milton
Elizabeth Orr, FLDEP (Virtual)
Mayor Pro Tem Bill Schaetzle, Niceville
Councilmember David Schmidt, Ft. Walton Beach (Virtual)
J.D. Smith, Governor Appointee
Commissioner Josh Street, Panama City
Commissioner Steve Stroberger, Escambia Co
Mayor Bobby Wagner, City of Destin
Mayor JB Whitten, Crestview

Members Not Present:
Commissioner Steven Barry, Escambia Co.
Tanya Branton, FDOT
Commissioner Danny Glidewell, Walton Co
Commissioner Jack Griffis, Springfield
Councilmember Casey Jones, Pensacola
Commissioner Carolyn Ketchel, Okaloosa Co
Commissioner Drew Palmer, Okaloosa Co
Commissioner Daniel Raffield, Bay County
Mayor JB Schluter, Gulf Breeze
Commissioner Kerry Smith, Santa Rosa Co
Commissioner Earl Stafford, Holmes County
Commissioner Colten Wright, Santa Rosa Co

Others Present:
Sydney Black, FDOT (Virtual)
Craig Carnes, Metric Engineering (Virtual)
Rafael Casasus, SICE (Virtual)
Edison Caetano, Metric Engineering (Virtual)
Cindy Campbell, FDOT (Virtual)
Macy Falcon, Kimley-Horn
Ben Faust, DRMP

Cassidy Haney, FL Greenways & Trails
Lexi Harris, Citizen (Virtual)
Donnie Hicks, NWFL WMD
Latilda Hughes-Neel, City of Freeport
Renata Leach, Metric (Virtual)
Yue Liu, Kimley-Horn (Virtual)
Logan McDonald, 1000 Friends of Florida (Virtual)
Dave Murzin, Town of Century
Gary Quasebarth, MechDyne (Virtual)
Jarrod Simpson, Gray-Robinson (Virtual)
Lindsay Slautterback, Kimley-Horn (Virtual)
Steve Vancore, Clearview Research, (Virtual)
Bekah Wagner, Citizen
Cory Wilkinson, HDR
Kandase Lee, ECRC
Dawn Schwartz, ECRC (Virtual)
Renee Quick, ECRC (Virtual)
Karen Harrell, ECRC (Virtual)
Tiffany Bates, ECRC
Rae Emary, ECRC
Gary Kramer, ECRC (Virtual)
Leandra Meredith, ECRC
Tammy Neal, ECRC
Jill Nobles, ECRC
Jill Strickler, ECRC (Virtual)
Danielle Tartaglione, ECRC (Virtual)
Gina Watson, ECRC (Virtual)

Call to Order
Chair Qualls called the meeting to order.

Prayer and Pledge of Allegiance
The prayer was led by JD Smith, 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: 7-Layer Cake Achievement Milestones
Kandase Lee updated the board on ECRC's strategic initiatives using the "Seven-Layer Cake" model, reporting that the top four layers are complete as promised and highlighting funding secured for the remaining three projects: $11 million for regional plan implementation, $42.5 million for broadband and fiber deployment, and $22.5 million for the Regional Traffic Management Center.

Item 2: Regional Rural Transportation Program Update

Jill Nobles, Transportation Planner, presented the draft Regional Rural Transportation Program (RRTP) Plan minor update, explaining that a full update to the Rural Transportation Plan is scheduled to begin in 2027. Jill Nobles further explained that interim updates to the projects included in the plan will be needed.

The minor update process officially opens August 27, 2026 with public outreach, to include a virtual workshop, begins in the September-October 2026 timeframe, with the RRTP TAC to consider the recommendation of approval of the minor update at the November 2026 meeting. Jill Nobles noted that the minor updated plan will be presented at the November 18, 2026 meeting for ECRC Board approval and adoption.

Item 3: Amendment 3 Update

Steve Vancore, President Clearview Research, provided updated information on Florida's Amendment 3, "Save our Homes from Excessive Property Tax".

The Florida Legislature passed joint resolution HJR 1, sending a constitutional amendment to the November 2026 ballot that would significantly increase homestead property tax exemptions, while capping non-homestead annual valuation increases at five percent (5%). Steve Vancore explained while aimed at providing property tax relief, the measure is estimated to reduce local government revenues without a clear funding replacement plan. To offset these losses, local authorities may be forced to raise millage rates on non-exempt properties, increase local sales taxes and service fees, or accept substantial local budget cuts that could weaken community infrastructure and public services.

Action Items:

Item 4: Approval of the May 20, 2026 Meeting Minutes

Chair Qualls asked for action on the May 20, 2026 meeting minutes.

Mayor Wagner moved to approve the May 20, 2026 meeting minutes as presented. The motion was seconded by Mayor Whitten and was unanimously approved.

Item 5: Approval of April – June 2026 Financial Statements

Chair Qualls asked for action on the April – June 2026 financial statements.

Council Member Sutton moved to approve the April - June 2026 financial statements as presented. The motion was seconded by J D Smith and was unanimously approved.

Item 6: Resolution ECRC 2026-10, Approval and Adoption of the Regional Rural Transportation Program Public Participation Plan

Rae Emary, Marketing & Outreach Coordinator, presented the updated draft Regional Rural Transportation Program (RRTP) Public Participation Plan (PPP) 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.

Rae Emary stated the draft PPP was distributed to the ECRC board members at the May 2026 meeting for review which opened the 45-day public review process.

J D Smith moved to approve Resolution ECRC 2026-10, approving and adopting the Regional Rural Transportation Program (RRTP) Public Participation Plan (PPP). The motion was seconded by Mayor Wagner and was unanimously approved.

Item 7: Resolution ECRC 2026-11, Approval of the ITS Demonstration Project Design-Build Firm

Kandase Lee, ECRC CEO, explained that Emerald Coast Regional Council (ECRC) applied for and was awarded a Demonstration and Planning Grant through the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Safe Streets for All Program. The grant agreement was finalized in the first quarter of 2026. Kandase Lee further explained that in February 2026, through Resolution ECRC 2026-11, the Board authorized staff to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP).

On May 1, 2026, ECRC issued an RFP seeking a design-build team to design, construct, and implement an ITS demonstration project along corridors identified in the Safe Streets for All Safety Action Plan in Escambia County on FDOT right-of-way and received four (4) letters of interest. The Technical Review Committee met to review the letters of interest, shortlist the responsive firms, and evaluate the technical proposals. They ranked the top three (3) firms as follows:

1. Sice/Metric
2. TCD/AtkinsRealis
3. Transcore/Halff

Mayor Wagner moved to approve Resolution ECRC 2026-11, accepting the Technical Review Committee's recommendation and authorizing the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to negotiate and execute a design-build contract for Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) improvements in support of the Safe Streets for All Demonstration Grant. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Street and was unanimously approved.

Item 8: Resolution ECRC 2026-12, Approval of the RTMC Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Kandase Lee, ECRC CEO, explained that the FL-AL TPO and Escambia County previously entered into a Construction Management Agreement governing administration of the Regional Transportation Management Center (RTMC) project. She further explained that Escambia County requested the MOU to clarify the roles and responsibilities of Escambia County, the FL-AL TPO, and the Emerald Coast Regional Council during construction of the RTMC. The MOU is intended to improve communication, facilitate coordination among the parties, and support effective project administration throughout construction.

Commissioner Street moved to approve Resolution ECRC 2026-12, approving and accepting the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for project administration between the Florida-Alabama Transportation Planning Organization (FL-AL TPO) and Escambia County. The motion was seconded by Council Member Sutton and was unanimously approved.

Item 9: Evaluation of the Chief Executive Officer

Chair Qualls reported that the Executive Committee met August 19, 2026, to discuss the annual evaluation of Chief Executive Officer Kandase Lee. Each Executive Committee member independently evaluated Kandase Lee and submitted individual scores. The Committee then discussed each evaluation category and reviewed the scores collectively. Based on the results of the evaluation, the Executive Committee recommended a 5% salary increase to the Board.

Mayor Pro Tem Schaetzle proposed a three percent (3%) salary increase with a monetary bonus, noting that staff are to receive a maximum increase of four percent (4%).

Mayor Campbell moved to increase Kandase Lee's salary by four percent (4%) with no additional monetary bonus. The motion was seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Schaetzle.

Further discussion included that the issue was not related to funding and that Kandase Lee's contributions to ECRC were invaluable. It was suggested that her role and compensation be reevaluated in six (6) months for a potential additional increase.

Mayor Wagner made a substitute motion to approve the Executive Committee's recommended five percent (5%) salary increase for Kandase Lee. The motion was seconded by Mayor Andrews and was unanimously approved.

Item 10: Approval of the FY2026-2027 Annual Budget and Work Program

Dawn Schwartz, ECRC CFO, presented the ECRC fiscal year October 1, 2026, through September 30, 2027 (FY2026-2027) budget and work program, totaling $13,655,982, and noted an increase from FY2025-2026. Dawn Schwartz explained that the budget includes additional funding from several 7-Layer Cake projects and welcomed questions or comments.

Mayor Campbell moved to approve the FY2026-2027 Annual Budget and Work Program. The motion was seconded by J D Smith and was unanimously approved.

Item 11: Nomination and Election of Chair & Vice Chair and Executive Committee to Serve October 1, 2026 – September 30, 2027

Chair Qualls opened the floor for nominations. Mayor Campbell stated he would like to retain the current ECRC officers and Executive Committee for the next fiscal year.

Commissioner Street suggested the possibility of rotating the Chair and Vice Chair position between the counties each year similar to the MPOAC structure in an effort to assure each area of the region has equal representation, continuity, and extensive team building.

Discussion included concerns about board tenure, experience, and the institutional knowledge those factors provide regarding ECRC and the region, as well as questions about limited participation.

Commissioner Stroberger volunteered for the Executive Committee.

Mayor Campbell moved to retain Kurvin Qualls as ECRC Chair and Councilmember April Sutton as ECRC Vice Chair, and to appoint Kurvin Qualls, Councilmember April Sutton, JD Smith, Mayor Pamn Henderson, and Commissioner Steve Stroberger to the ECRC Executive Committee, to serve October 1, 2026 – September 30, 2027. The motion was seconded by Mayor Wagner and was unanimously approved.

Commissioner Street noted that rotating the Chair and Vice Chair positions could encourage broader participation and ensure all members feel engaged and represented.

Mayor Wagner expressed interest in being considered for the Chair or Vice Chair position for FY2027-2028.

Mayor Wagner moved to direct staff to prepare a resolution establishing a rotation for the Chair and Vice Chair positions and to present it to the Board for consideration at a future meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Street and was unanimously approved.

Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:19pm.

Duly passed and approved by the Emerald Coast Regional Council on this 18th day of November, 2026.

By: _____ **Date:** Nov. 18, 2026

Kurvin Qualls, ECRC Chair