

## **Emerald Coast Regional Council**

Meeting Minutes

The Chautauqua Building

95 Circle Drive

DeFuniak Springs, FL 32435

February 19, 2025, 11:30am



### **Members Present:**

Kurvin Qualls, Governor Appointee, Chair  
Mayor Tracy Andrews, City of Chipley  
Councilmember Jim Bagby, City of Destin  
Darryl Boudreau, NWFLWMD  
Tanya Branton, FDOT  
Mayor Bob Campbell, City of DeFuniak Springs  
Commissioner Doug Crosby, Bay County (Virtual)  
Kasey Cuchens, Governor Appointee  
Mayor Pam Henderson, City of Callaway  
Mayor Heather Lindsay, City of Milton  
Councilmember Casey Jones, City of Pensacola  
Commissioner Andrew Palmer, Okaloosa County  
Commissioner Claire Pease, Bay County (Virtual)  
Mayor Dick Rynearson, City of Fort Walton Beach (Virtual)  
Councilmember Bill Schaetzle, City of Niceville  
Mayor JB Schluter, City of Gulf Breeze (Virtual)  
Commissioner Kerry Smith, Santa Rosa County (Virtual)  
J.D. Smith, Governor Appointee  
Commissioner Josh Street, City of Panama City  
Councilmember April Sutton, City of Mary Esther

### **Others Present:**

Bruce Barnhart, (Virtual)  
Sierra Eades, WGI, (Virtual)  
Leslie Guyer, City of Gulf Breeze (Virtual)  
Gary Huston, Legal Counsel ECRC (Virtual)  
Terry Shaw, Kimley Horn  
Koby Townsend, City of DeFuniak Springs  
Chris Wallace, City of DeFuniak Springs  
Cory Wilkinson, HDR  
Kandase Lee, CEO, ECRC  
Dawn Schwartz, CFO ECRC (Virtual)  
Renee Quick, HR Director, ECRC  
Ada Clark, Community and Economic Development Director, ECRC (Virtual)  
Annie Arguello, Marketing & Outreach Director, ECRC  
Eric Christianson, Planner, ECRC (Virtual)  
Rae Emary, Marketing & Outreach Coordinator, ECRC

Gary Kramer, Planner, ECRC  
Leandra Meredith, Marketing & Outreach Coordinator, ECRC  
Tammy Neal, Executive Administrative Assistant, ECRC  
Jill Nobles, Planner ECRC  
Roshita Taylor, Planner ECRC  
Gina Watson, Executive Administrative Assistant, ECRC (Virtual)

**Members Not Present:**

Commissioner Steven Barry, Escambia County  
Councilmember Paul Casto, City of Panama City Beach  
Commissioner Danny Glidewell, Walton County  
Commissioner Trey Goodwin, Okaloosa County  
Commissioner Jack Griffis, City of Springfield  
Commissioner Ashley Hofberger, Escambia County  
Elizabeth Orr, FL Department of Environmental Protection  
Mayor Ann Sexton, City of Paxton  
Commissioner Earl Stafford, Holmes County  
Commissioner Judy Vandegrift, City of Lynn Haven  
Mayor JB Whitten, City of Crestview  
Commissioner Colten Wright, Santa Rosa County

**Call to Order**

Chair Qualls called the meeting to order.

**Call for 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.

Chair Qualls stated there were two additional action items to the agenda and asked board members to approve the added items as Action Item 1b and Action Item 8a.

*Mayor Henderson moved to approve the agenda with additional Action Item 1b and Action Item 8b. The motion was seconded by JD Smith and was unanimously approved.*

**Public Forum:**

Chair Qualls opened the Public Forum.

With no comments, Chair Qualls closed the Public Forum.

**Action Items**

**Item 1: Vice Chair Appointment**

Chair Qualls stated Kasey Cuchens submitted a letter of resignation from the position of ECRC Chair. As stated in the ECRC adopted bylaws, along with *Robert's Rules of Order*, the Vice Chair shall perform the duties of Chair and assume the chair position. Chair Qualls further explained the position of vice chair would need to be filled.

Chair Qualls opened the floor for nominations for Vice Chair.

With multiple nominations being presented, Chair Qualls called for a written ballot vote with the board member receiving the majority of votes to be elected.

Mayor Pro Tem April Sutton received the majority of the votes.

*Mayor Henderson moved to elect Mayor Pro Tem April Sutton as ECRC Vice Chair to serve the remainder of FY 2024-2025. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Pease and was unanimously approved.*

**\*Add-On Item 1b.- Executive Committee Seat**

Chair Qualls opened the floor for nominations to fill the ECRC Executive Committee vacancy.

Mayor Pamn Henderson was nominated.

*Chair Qualls moved to appoint Mayor Pamn Henderson to fill the vacant seat on the ECRC Executive Committee for the remainder of FY 2024-2025. The motion was seconded by JD Smith and was unanimously approved.*

**Item 2: Approval of the December 12, 2024 Meeting Minutes**

Chair Qualls asked for action on the December 12, 2024 Board meeting minutes.

Councilmember Schaetzle requested to amend the two motions taken in Action Item 4 in the December 12, 2024 meeting minutes to reflect the votes in opposition, as follows:

“Mayor Henderson moved to clarify that the approved monetary payout for Howard Vanselow and Kandase Lee is to be a one-time event and to encourage staff to utilize unearned annual leave hours prior to the end of the fiscal year. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Qualls and approved, with Councilmember Schaetzle and Commissioner Smith voting in opposition.”

“Mayor Henderson moved to authorize monetary payments to Howard Vanselow for the 6.36 hours and Kandase Lee for the 160.10 hours earned annual leave forfeited for the FY 2023-2024. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Qualls and approved with Councilman Schaetzle and Commissioner Smith voting in opposition.”

Commissioner Smith asked if the Executive Committee had met to discuss the CEO Severance Package and if there was an update available for the Board.

Chair Qualls stated the Executive Committee had not had an opportunity to meet but would convene during the first or second week of March to discuss.

*Mayor Henderson moved to approve the December 12, 2024 meeting minutes to include Councilmember Shaetzle’s amendment requests. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Sutton and was unanimously approved.*

**Item 3: Approval of October – December 2024 Financial Statements**

Chair Qualls asked for action on the October – December 2024 financial statements.

*JD Smith moved to approve the October – December 2024 financial statements. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Sutton and was unanimously approved.*

#### **Item 4: Approval of the Amended FY 2024-2025 Budget and Work Program**

Chair Qualls asked Kandase Lee, ECRC CEO, to present.

Kandase Lee stated ECRC received approximately \$879,000 in additional funding from the Department of Transportation, District 3 and further stated the additional funding will be primarily used in the Florida-Alabama Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) area to expand the ATMS/ITS efforts.

*Mayor Henderson moved to approve the amended FY 2024-2025 Budget and Work Program. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Sutton and was unanimously approved.*

#### **Item 5: Membership Revision**

Chair Qualls asked Kandase Lee to present.

Kandase Lee explained that ECRC has looked to engage with the rural communities of northwest Florida and sought their participation in the many beneficial programs the ECRC offers. For the smallest of the towns the current membership fee is \$250, which can be a large amount in a fiscally constrained budget.

Kandase Lee requested that the board approve a modification to its membership structure to allow for any city/town under the population of 1,000 persons to have a no-cost membership with the ECRC to encourage participation, and to reimburse the three towns that have paid current memberships.

Current cities/towns with a population under 1,000:

- |                                 |                            |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| • Caryville                     | • Paxton – Paid current FY |
| • Cinco Bayou                   | • Ponce de Leon            |
| • Ebro                          | • Shalimar                 |
| • Esto                          | • Vernon                   |
| • Jay – Paid current FY         | • Wausau                   |
| • Laurel Hill – Paid current FY | • Westville                |
| • Noma                          |                            |

Chair Qualls opened the floor for discussion.

Vice Chair Sutton stated waiving the membership fees for the rural communities would be extremely beneficial in helping them secure funding for much needed projects. Vice Chair Sutton stated she fully supported staff's recommendation.

Further discussion ensued.

*J D Smith moved to modify the Emerald Coast Regional Council membership rates to waive the fee for cities/towns with populations under 1,000 citizens, and to reimburse the town of Jay, Laurel Hill, and Paxton their current memberships. The motion was seconded by Mayor Pro-Tem Sutton and was unanimously approved.*

#### **Item 6: Resolution ECRC 2025-01, Approval and Adoption of the Transportation Regional Incentive Program (TRIP) Applications (FY2027-2031) Project Priorities**

Chair Qualls asked Roshita Taylor, ECRC Planner, to present.

Roshita Taylor stated that ECRC is the designated Regional Transportation Area serving the regional needs of Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton, Bay, Washington, and Holmes counties. As such, ECRC receives applications for TRIP projects and prioritizes them for submission to the FDOT when funds are available. Roshita Taylor further stated only projects on the regional network for the seven counties qualify for these funds through the ECRC.

Roshita Taylor explained the three (3) TRIP applications that were submitted as follows:

- Bay County: Pipeline Road Extension – County Lake Drive to Nehi Road
- Okaloosa County: Around the Mound Design
- Washington County: Greenhead Road Phase I

*Councilmember Schaetzle moved to authorize the ECRC chair to sign Resolution ECRC 2025-01, adopting the Transportation Regional Incentive Program (TRIP) applications FY 2027-2031 Project Priorities. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Sutton and was unanimously approved.*

**Item 7: Resolution ECRC 2025-02, Approval and Adoption of the Transportation Alternatives (TA) Set-Aside Ranked Projects for FY 2027-2031**

Chair Qualls asked Roshita Taylor, ECRC Planner, to present.

Roshita Taylor stated that the Transportation Alternatives (TA) Set-Aside provides funding for programs and projects consistent with Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act. These set-aside funds include all projects and activities defined as TA: on-and-off road pedestrian and bicycle facilities, infrastructure projects for improving non-driver access to public transportation, community improvement activities, environmental mitigation, and projects for planning, designing, or constructing boulevards and other roadways largely in the right-of-way of formerly divided highways.

Roshita Taylor further stated that FDOT District 3 issued guidance on the 2025 TA Set-Aside cycle for the FY 2027-2031 Tentative Work Program on November 1, 2024, which specified ECRC may submit up to five (5) prioritized projects from the ECRC rural area.

The following four projects were submitted and will be ranked by ECRC and then submitted to FDOT:

- City of Bonifay – SR 79 Shared-Use Path (from Thomas Drive to US 90)
- City of Century – Complete Streets Master Plan
- City of Century – Freedom Road Safety Enhancement Project (from 700 Freedom Road to 742 Freedom Road)
- Walton County – Lake Jackson Multi-Use Path Phase 2 (along Lake Drive and Lake Road to SR 85)

*Mayor Henderson moved to authorize the ECRC chair to sign Resolution ECRC 2025-02, adopting the Transportation Alternatives (TA) Set-Aside Ranked Projects for FY 2027-2031. The motion was seconded by Kasey Cuchens and was unanimously approved.*

**Item 8: Resolution ECRC 2025-03, Approval and Adoption of the Smart Regions Plan**

Chair Qualls asked Terry Shaw, Kimley-Horn, to present.

Terry Shaw stated that ECRC, in partnership with the Florida-Alabama TPO, has developed a comprehensive Smart Regions Master Plan to identify lifesaving technology concepts across the ECRC and TPO areas and further stated the plan is a resource for improvements and concepts should a local government choose to implement.

*Kasey Cuchens moved authorize the ECRC chair to sign Resolution ECRC 2025-03, adopting the Emerald Coast Regional Council Smart Regions Plan. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Sutton and was unanimously approved.*

**\*Add-On Item 8b: Discussion from Councilmember Bill Schaetzle**

Councilmember Bill Schaetzle made a request to discuss four (4) items:

1. A request that ECRC Board meetings be published earlier for planning purposes;

Councilmember Schaetzle stated the first request had been addressed in Agenda Item 11.

2. A request that the ECRC Board meetings rotate throughout the ECRC region in an effort for maximum attendance and participation;
3. A request that the ECRC Board meet after O-W TPO meetings occur in case any TPO business needs to be addressed by the ECRC Board;

Chair Qualls asked Kandase Lee, ECRC CEO to address Councilmember Schaetzle's requests.

Kandase Lee stated many factors go into coordinating the ECRC Board meetings. Staff diligently coordinates meeting dates in an effort not to conflict with city or county government meetings and consistently searches for locations that are centrally located within ECRC's seven county region. Kandase Lee further stated there were times in the past where ECRC's Board meeting would occur on the same day as the Okaloosa-Walton TPO due to scheduling and location issues.

Kasey Cuchens added that in the event an item is deemed critical by a TPO or any other board needing be addressed by the ECRC Board, the ECRC Chair has the flexibility to schedule a special meeting.

4. A request for clarification on whether the ECRC Executive Committee had met, and if not, when it would be scheduled.

Chair Qualls stated the ECRC Executive Committee has not yet met, but will within the first two weeks of March, 2025 at a location to be determined.

**Information Items:**

**Item 9: Review of RTMC Final Plans**

Sierra Eades, Architect WGI, Inc, presented a brief update on the Regional Transportation Management Center's final plans, to include updates on permitting and a possible timeframe for ground-breaking.

**Item 10: RRTP Project Priorities**

Gary Kramer, ECRC Transportation Planner, gave a brief update on the upcoming schedule for the Regional Rural Transportation Project Priorities FY 2027-2031, further stating the Project Priorities FY 2027-2031 were presented to the board for review and would be presented for approval and adoption at the May 2025 meeting.

**Item 11: ECRC Board Meeting Schedule**

The ECRC Board meeting schedule was presented for the remainder of 2025.

**Adjournment**

*With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:07pm.*

Duly passed and approved by the Emerald Coast Regional Council on this 21st day of May, 2025.

By: \_\_\_\_\_

Kurvin Qualls, ECRC Chair

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

5/21/25