



Polk County Board of County Commissioners (Organizational)

Meeting Minutes - Draft

November 18, 2025 Regular BOCC Meeting

In accordance with the American with Disabilities Act, persons with disabilities needing special accommodations to participate in this proceeding should contact the Communications Office not later than 48 hours prior to the proceeding. Their office is located in the County Administration Building, 330 West Church Street in Bartow. Telephone (863) 534-6090 or TTY (863) 534-7777. If hearing impaired dial 7-1-1 for Florida Relay services or call (800) 955-8771 (TTY); dial (800) 955-1339 if you are using a computer.

Any invocation that may be offered before the official start of the Commission meeting shall be the voluntary offering of a private citizen, to and for the benefit of the Commission. The views or beliefs expressed by the invocation speaker have not been previously reviewed or approved by the Commission, and the Commission is not allowed by law to endorse the religious beliefs or views of this, or any other speaker.

If a person decides to appeal any decision made by the board with respect to any matter considered at such meeting or hearing, he or she will need a record of the proceedings, and that, for such purpose, he or she may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based.

Organizational Meeting

Rollcall

Present	Commissioner Becky Troutman, Commissioner Rick Wilson, Commissioner Bill Braswell, Commissioner Martha Santiago, and Commissioner Michael Scott
----------------	---

CALL TO ORDER - 9:00 a.m. (RICK WILSON, CHAIR)

INVOCATION

Murphy Hanley, Polk County Fire Rescue Chaplain

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE (RICK WILSON, CHAIR)

REORGANIZATION OF THE BOARD (RANDY MINK, COUNTY ATTORNEY)

1. Comments from the General Public regarding Reorganization of the Board.

Minutes: There was no one from the public wishing to speak on the reorganization of the Board.

2. Elect Chairperson.

Elect Martha Santiago as Chair.

RESULT:	APPROVED
MOVER:	Bill Braswell

SECONDER:	Becky Troutman
AYE:	Troutman, Wilson, Braswell, Santiago, and Scott

Minutes

Minutes: Chair Santiago thanked her fellow Commissioners for the vote of confidence. She said she appreciates it and she looks forward to this year being the Chair and helping out with the different aspects of the county.

3. Elect Vice Chairperson.

Elect Bill Braswell as Vice Chair.

RESULT:	APPROVED
MOVER:	Becky Troutman
SECONDER:	Rick Wilson
AYE:	Troutman, Wilson, Braswell, Santiago, and Scott

4. Adopt Resolution Authorizing Banks to Honor and Cash Warrants signed by new Chairperson and the Clerk effective November 18, 2025.

RESULT:	APPROVED
MOVER:	Bill Braswell
SECONDER:	Rick Wilson
AYE:	Troutman, Wilson, Braswell, Santiago, and Scott

5. Recognition of the outgoing Chair.

Minutes: Chair Santiago recognized Rick Wilson as the outgoing Chair. She said it is a privilege to recognize him for the outstanding job he has done as a leader. She said he has touched on a lot of things and issues and he has accomplished a lot during his tenure as Chair. She thanked him for his leadership and his commitment to our county from taking the lead daily with legislative matters to hosting our Polk County Day in Tallahassee; she stated he has made sure our priorities were heard. She said from heading up our board meetings and leading us through the budget session and Community Investment Program priorities he has continued to support the issues most important to the Commission and our community. She thanked him for his passion and dedication to Polk County and our residents.

Commissioner Wilson said it has been an honor working with the people on this Board and the staff in this county. He said it has been an honor and that makes it a lot easier. He said this past year, we always have our ups and downs, and working together we get through it. He said we work hard to make this county better. He said he appreciates the opportunity and he thanked everyone.

B. PUBLIC COMMENTS CONCERNING AGENDA ITEMS

B.1. Comments.

Minutes: Stephanie Yocum, Polk Education Association, said the millage referendum is not just part of their job but they should be in solid support of strong public schools. She said state representatives are defunding public schools to funnel billions of unaccountable tax dollars to private schools, for profit charters and home schools and the decision must be made to fund strong public schools. She said strong public schools are the foundation of democracy. She discussed the need for meaningful living wages for everyone who works in our public schools. She said to use their political and relational capital to lobby our state elected officials to fully fund public schools. She said starting in January, the Board will enjoy a salary for part-time work on this Board for \$2,000 less than the average teacher salary and twice as much as the average support staff is paid. She encouraged support.

Commissioner Wilson said he is not against this or any teacher and he wants things to be better. He said with how this went down is what he was against and with the tone. He said this is right where it needs to be and we got accomplished what we wanted to get accomplished so the people of this county know where this comes from.

Kat Nickell said she is a life long resident and a public school graduate. She said that the schools are funded as a rural area. She said with 446 posted instructional vacancies we need something to recruit and retain high quality educators. She discussed the various positions that are needed and said we are having a hard time with the funding from the state. She said as soon as this is placed on the ballot, she wants them to support this publicly.

Mathew Crowley said he is a special education para educator and a father. He said he shows up everyday in our schools because our kids deserve stability and support. He said that he make \$16.60 an hour to work with our most vulnerable students. He said because of the level of funding the schools receive we are in desperate need of more resources. He said we cannot recruit and retain qualified educators. He said people are not leaving because they do not love the work they are leaving because they cannot survive on the wages. He said they should be proud to trust voters with this choice. He said to put the measure on the ballot, support this publicly and let the community decide.

Diane Dreskler said she is a highly qualified educator that was recruited from out of state in 2017. She said since then she has seen the wages stagnate while the cost of living rises. She said that she has to discuss every year with her family if they continue staying here and hope everything gets better or do they leave and add to the problem of a shortage. She said there are long term subs in every department who are not qualified to teach and she said there is a substitute in her class trying to figure out how to teach AP Psychology and AP US History in the same day. She said she teaches her students that the most impactful in government is the local government. She said they can have the most impact for the county and the community. She said they can put the power of supporting public schools into the hands of the voters.

Meg Gadley said she is a proud teacher of Polk County public schools and said the millage impacts the classrooms. She said this is a dedicated revenue source that strengthens the school system and would generate millions of dollars of recurring funding and help with gaps in state funding. She said too many teachers leave because

they cannot afford to stay. She said without the funds teachers fill the gaps from their pockets. She said additional revenue supports critical roles. She said the voters have the right to decide.

Laura Allgood said she is a 24-year veteran music educator. She asked for them to put the referendum on the ballot. She said her salary has not been sufficient to keep up with inflation and the cost of living. She said many struggle and are working two jobs. She said the schools are in desperate need for higher wages and teachers. She urged them to do what is right and allow this to be placed on the ballot.

Michael Hayde said he is a 29-year veteran teacher. He discussed his roles as a teacher. He discussed the need to pay for the teachers. He said we are not going to be able to keep the good teachers here. He discussed a job offer with Hillsborough County paying \$22,000 more. He said he would like to spend the money that it takes to take care of the teachers and fix the problems in the schools. He said in neighboring counties you can see the differences in the facilities and the landscaping.

Tameris Roughl said she is an ESE inclusion teacher and her husband is a bus driver. She said we are in dire need of resources to retain qualified educators. She said they have substitutes teaching core classes and they do their best, but the students are not receiving the level of instruction needed. She said the students with long term subs are behind in school.

Bob Nickell asked them to place this on the ballot and to actively support this. He said 60% of the voters approved the environmental lands sales tax in 2022. He discussed other counties voting for the school tax. He discussed losing staff to other counties. He said voters will not be mad that this is placed on the ballot, they will be glad that they support education.

Christy Kirkland discussed students sharing workbooks due to cost. She said from 2008 to now there has been an average increase of 4.8% for veteran teachers; she said they are talking about \$2,600 that is the difference for a 23 year veteran. She said we have a county that is able to support. She asked for the referendum to be placed on the ballot.

Patrick Bentley said they are not alright. He discussed the need for higher wages. He said his colleagues cannot continue living and working here. He said to publicly support this.

The Chair closed the public comments.

Commissioner Scott thanked everyone who spoke today. He said we are voting by statute and it is administratively a vote that they do and there is not an opinion section for us to say yes or no. He said he was curious for more information about this. He said that education to the public is key. He said the voters will decide whether to approve this or not. He responded to public comment. He said for Ms. Nickell he appreciates the compassion that she had and the nature in which she delivered her message. He said it comes through a lot more clear when it is not tense, emotionally charged or mean sounding. He stated we look for ways to be better. He said he hopes Superintendent

Heid and the elected members of the School Board are listening to the fact that there are quite a few issues that exist within the Polk County School Board that the Commission here cannot fix. He said when his wife was an educator to have administration come around and tell her to take signs off of walls for high frequency words because it was not allowed for the current curriculum that is not right. He said to let the teachers teach. He said there are a lot of avenues with what is going on and he said to go to the state legislature to get what is necessary to provide the level of education that our kids and teachers deserve. He said we should invest in the teachers and the students and offer pay and benefits that are competitive. He said for our fire fighters, law enforcement and county staff we strive to be world class and we want to be the destination employer. He tasked the School Board to roll up their sleeves and find a way to do that. He said hearing what he heard today, even the 1 mill does not touch all of the areas that were addressed.

Commissioner Troutman thanked everyone for being here. She said she is a mom, a tax payer, former special education teacher, and she has a child that attends public school. She said she asked for this to be pulled off the Consent Agenda and she did that because she thinks it is a firm responsibility of this Board to ensure that the public understands the process and she believes they accomplished that. She said there were comments that came up that this has been discussed for months and none of us watch the School Board meetings and she is sure the School Board does not sit and watch our meetings. She said this Board has taken two weeks to discuss this process under the responsibility that she feels that the public deserves to know what is happening. She stated that the more clear we can make it the better it will be for everyone. She said she is glad she is not Superintendent Heid with the issues to fix that have been communicated to many of us since this has come up. She said somebody mentioned that if the voters know where the money is going they will approve it and she said there appears to be a lot of distrust about where the money is going. She said they do want to see the teachers stay and the children to get a good education. She wished success on this and said from the very beginning no one on this Board never said they had a desire for this to not be on the ballot. She said they wanted the public to understand the process. She said we will support this going on the ballot and we do not have a choice in it.

Chair Santiago said no one on this Board said they do not approve of this. She said her career has been embedded in education. She said some of the issues she has been hearing are issues she has been hearing for many many years. She said she supports education and she has two children who are teachers and she asked do you think that she does not hear what is going on. She said one of their responsibilities is fiscal responsibility. She said this was brought to their attention two weeks ago and this is her eighth year as a Commissioner and they have never raised the millage rate. She said this is the year when they did not do anything with them so when all of the sudden we get this information that we have to increase the millage rate it blew her mind how someone is telling us to do that. She said she supports education and the teachers. She said she wanted to make sure she had the correct information and she still does not like the process and she wants people to know that she supports education. She said she will vote for this even though people think we raised the millage rate.

Commissioner Scott said the public school system is badly broken and if it is that

broken then 1 mill of a property tax is like throwing a squirt gun on a forest fire. He said from the union, the individual teachers, and anyone who has a voice to use that and be empowered and make a change.

Chair Santiago welcomed Superintendent Heid and the School Board members present. She said she knows how their schedule is busy and they appreciate them being here with us.

Commissioner Troutman said she hopes in the future that we go back to the basics of reaching out to individuals and using your own relationships of political capital to make the process better.

C. APPROVE CONSENT AGENDA

C.1. Approve Consent Agenda.

RESULT:	APPROVED
MOVER:	Rick Wilson
SECONDER:	Bill Braswell
AYE:	Troutman, Wilson, Braswell, Santiago, and Scott

D. COUNTY COMPTROLLER (STACY M. BUTTERFIELD, CPA)

D.1. Disbursements.

RESULT:	APPROVED
MOVER:	Becky Troutman
SECONDER:	Michael Scott
AYE:	Troutman, Wilson, Braswell, Santiago, and Scott

D.2. Minutes of Regular Board meeting held on November 4, 2025.

RESULT:	APPROVED
MOVER:	Becky Troutman
SECONDER:	Rick Wilson
AYE:	Troutman, Wilson, Braswell, Santiago, and Scott

F. COUNTY ATTORNEY (RANDY MINK)

F.1. Adopt Resolution Calling for a School Board of Polk County Referendum on November 3, 2026, General Election Ballot on the School Board of Polk County, Florida authorization to impose an additional 1.0 mill ad valorem tax annually on taxable property in Polk County for School Operating Purposes beginning July 1, 2027, and ending June 30, 2031.

Minutes: County Attorney Randy Mink discussed the resolution calling for a School

Board of Polk County Referendum on November 3, 2026, General Election Ballot on the School Board of Polk County, Florida authorization to impose an additional 1.0 mill ad valorem tax annually on taxable property in Polk County for School Operating Purposes beginning July 1, 2027, and ending June 30, 2031.

Commissioner Troutman said that she hopes that this will be our first and last as we hope this process is visited by the state legislature.

RESULT:	APPROVED
MOVER:	Michael Scott
SECONDER:	Bill Braswell
AYE:	Troutman, Wilson, Braswell, Santiago, and Scott

F.2. Approve Amendment No. 1 to Agreement No. QG010 between Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and Polk County and to fund the Wilson Ranch Reserve Hydrological Restoration Project. (no fiscal impact)

Minutes: County Attorney Randy Mink discussed the Amendment No. 1 to Agreement No. QG010 between Florida Department of Environmental Protection and Polk County and to fund the Wilson Ranch Reserve Hydrological Restoration Project.

Commissioner Wilson recused from voting.

RESULT:	APPROVED
MOVER:	Bill Braswell
SECONDER:	Michael Scott
AYE:	Troutman, Braswell, Santiago, and Scott
Recused:	Wilson

F.3. Approve the Conservation Easement with HGS, LLC, dba RES Environmental Operating Company (Grantor) in favor of Polk County, a political subdivision of the State of Florida (Grantee). (No Fiscal Impact)

Minutes: County Attorney Randy Mink discussed the conservation easement with HGS, LLC.

Commissioner Wilson recused from voting.

RESULT:	APPROVED
MOVER:	Bill Braswell
SECONDER:	Becky Troutman
AYE:	Troutman, Braswell, Santiago, and Scott
Recused:	Wilson

G. COUNTY MANAGER (BILL BEASLEY)

G.1. Accept the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Department of Homeland Security, 2024 Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (FF) Grant (SAFER) funding opportunity for 50 additional firefighter positions and approve the establishment of the new positions. (\$10,228,826.66 one-time

revenue, \$6,358,459.84 cash match).

Minutes: County Manager Bill Beasley recommended the Board approve the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Department of Homeland Security, 2024 Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Grant by authorizing Holly Newton, Financial Administrator of Polk County Fire Rescue to accept the grant on the Boards behalf, approve the 50 additional firefighter positions, and approve the budget resolution to establish FY25/26 budget for the unanticipated revenue in the amount of \$5,529,095.50. He stated that the remaining years will be budgeted during the yearly budget process.

Upon question, Mr. Beasley said we had one of these grants eight years ago. He said then it was a four year agreement and now it is three years. He said the last one was in 2017, but we had one or two prior to 2017.

Upon question, Fire Chief Shawn Smith said for 2024-2025 overtime is down 22% and the mandatory overtime is down 82%. He confirmed that there will always be a level of overtime but not mandatory overtime. He said they had the 72 positions to help with overlapping resources with vacation, sick and FMLA. He said the paramedic classification is majority of the mandatory overtime.

County Attorney Randy Mink confirmed that the motion covers all three parts included in the recommendation.

RESULT:	APPROVED
MOVER:	Rick Wilson
SECONDER:	Bill Braswell
AYE:	Troutman, Wilson, Braswell, Santiago, and Scott

G.2. Approve an Interlocal Agreement between the City of Winter Haven (CITY) and Polk County, a political subdivision of the State of Florida (COUNTY) for the protection of Astute Financial Land Trust property, located on the eastern shore of Lake Pansy and accept Conservation Easement for recordation. (\$600,000 one-time expense)

Minutes: County Manager Bill Beasley discussed an interlocal agreement between the City of Winter Haven and Polk County for the protection of Astute Financial Land Trust property, located on the eastern shore of Lake Pansy and accept conservation easement for recordation. He recommended approval.

RESULT:	APPROVED
MOVER:	Becky Troutman
SECONDER:	Bill Braswell
AYE:	Troutman, Wilson, Braswell, Santiago, and Scott

G.3. Approve Consultant Services Authorization (CSA) No. 2025-032-01 with AECOM Technical Services, Inc. (Consultant) for the Spirit Lake Road Roundabout Project. (\$846,132.75 one-time expense)

Minutes: County Manager Bill Beasley discussed the Consultant Services Authorization No. 2025-032-01 with AECOM Technical Services, Inc., for the Spirit

Lake Road roundabout project. He recommended approval.

RESULT:	APPROVED
MOVER:	Rick Wilson
SECONDER:	Michael Scott
AYE:	Troutman, Wilson, Braswell, Santiago, and Scott

H. COMMISSIONER DISTRICT 1 (BECKY TROUTMAN)

H.1. Reappoint Matthew S. Swingle as a Member of the Lakes Access Advisory Committee, for the three-year term, November 17, 2025 through November 16, 2028. (District 1 Appointment)

RESULT:	APPROVED
MOVER:	Becky Troutman
SECONDER:	Rick Wilson
AYE:	Troutman, Wilson, Braswell, Santiago, and Scott

H.2. Commissioner Troutman Comments.

Minutes: Commissioner Troutman had no comments.

I. COMMISSIONER DISTRICT 2 (RICK WILSON)

I.1. Reappoint Linda M. Schultz, Esq. as an Alternate Member of the Polk County Planning Commission, for the three-year term, January 3, 2026 through January 2, 2029. (District 2 Appointment)

RESULT:	APPROVED
MOVER:	Rick Wilson
SECONDER:	Bill Braswell
AYE:	Troutman, Wilson, Braswell, Santiago, and Scott

I.2. Commissioner Wilson Comments.

Minutes: Commissioner Wilson had no comments.

J. COMMISSIONER DISTRICT 3 (BILL BRASWELL)

J.1. Commissioner Braswell Comments.

Minutes: Commissioner Braswell had no comments.

K. COMMISSIONER DISTRICT 4 (MARTHA SANTIAGO)

K.1. Appoint Cyle Rickner to the Polk County Lakes Access Advisory Committee for the three-year term, November 17, 2025, to November 16, 2028.

RESULT:	APPROVED
----------------	-----------------

MOVER:	Bill Braswell
SECONDER:	Michael Scott
AYE:	Troutman, Wilson, Braswell, Santiago, and Scott

L. COMMISSIONER DISTRICT 5 (MICHAEL SCOTT)

L.1. Commissioner Scott Comments.

Minutes: Commissioner Scott thanked Waste and Recycling Director Dale Henderson and said he is moving onto the City of Miami. He said we have grown a lot as a county to better serve our residents from garbage to hurricane debris and everything in between. He said we will miss him and it will be big shoes to fill. He thanked all the staff with helping him complete his first year on the Board. He said he has been blessed with knowledge and intelligence across the county with every single division and he said all are valuable to him and he appreciates the support. He wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving.

Chair Santiago said we are upset Mr. Henderson is leaving and we wish him the best.

Waste and Recycling Director Dale Henderson said he is humbled. He said that because of staff and the Board's leadership Solid Waste is in a much better position than it was two and a half years ago. He said we have set the stage for world class performance both at the landfill and our collection services. He said his team and the contractors all know what to do moving forward. He thanked the Board for the leadership and for allowing him to do the job that he loves. He said the residents and businesses are going to benefit with what they have done with the Solid Waste Division.

Commissioner Braswell said since he has been here he does not think he has gotten two emails about garbage.

K.2. Commissioner Santiago Comments.

Minutes: Chair Santiago wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving and safe travels.

O. PUBLIC HEARINGS

Minutes: County Attorney Randy Mink reminded the audience of the procedures for public hearings and swore in those who plan to speak.

O.1. Public Hearing to consider the adoption of an Ordinance of the Polk County Board of County Commissioners establishing the "Mandatory Milestone Inspection Program."

Minutes: County Attorney Randy Mink reviewed the ordinance of the Polk County Board of County Commissioners establishing the "Mandatory Milestone Inspection Program". He recommended approval.

The Chair opened a public hearing; no one spoke.

RESULT:	APPROVED
----------------	-----------------

MOVER:	Becky Troutman
SECONDER:	Michael Scott
AYE:	Troutman, Wilson, Braswell, Santiago, and Scott

P. REQUEST FROM THE GENERAL PUBLIC/AUDIENCE AND OPPORTUNITY TO BE HEARD

P.1. Colleen Harrison - Land Development/Road Issues

Minutes: Colleen Harrison discussed her road and said it is a dirt road. She said that George Burt was to pave the road and he has not. She said there are three streets that make up the road. She said that he finished two roads and said a large pipe was installed that diverts all of the road from a canal off of Knights Station Road onto their road. She said they are not able to receive emergency services and said it is a serious problem. She asked that he not be able to develop the property until he brings the road into compliance. She asked that the road be repaired and maintained.

County Attorney Randy Mink confirmed this is a private road. He said we cannot use tax money for a private road.

P.3. Comments.

Minutes: Danny Ballard discussed Margo Burt Road. He discussed rains and said that the road turns into a river and the dirt washes to his house. He said he has had to shovel mud out of his driveway. He asked if there is anything they can do about it.

Upon question, Roads and Drainage Director Jay Jarvis said he is not aware of any easements that exist that would make them public. He said if they would be willing to consider easements if they are connected or if an easement was acquired along the entire drainage system.

County Attorney Randy Mink said they can look at water being directed to the property and make sure it has been permitted and done accurately.

Kay Bourque discussed animal control and said we have the lowest save rate. She said that it is disappointing that they are not willing to consider the proposals or engage in constructive dialogue. She said she is saddened that we are not doing more. She asked for an animal welfare advisory committee.

Kristen Ahlberg said Polk County has one of the highest kill rates. She discussed concerns with sick animals being adopted and said there is no ventilation in the shelter.

Patricia Jacques said she is here on behalf of Cecilia Jennings and Cat Rescue Alliance. She said that Ms. Jennings was told she could not feed cats. She discussed the services that are needed and asked when will the county acknowledge this crisis.

Debbie Hicks said they know where she stands. She said she is waiting to see if any Commissioners are on board so she can repeat what she would like to happen. She wished them a Happy Thanksgiving.

Brother Anthony Lawrence said he loves this great nation that we are living in. He wished everyone peace and blessings. He congratulated Chair Santiago. He said he got a speeding ticket and offered the state trooper strawberries even though he was guilty and he did not have a bad attitude. He discussed being uplifting so we can all work together. He said we love our county and the northeast section is growing. He thanked them for being who they are and said the Board and the sheriff is doing a great job. He said they must understand Polk County is growing by leaps and bounds. He wished them a wonderful Thanksgiving.

Chair Santiago thanked Bishop Lawrence for the work he does with the communities.

Commissioner Scott said the way that you deliver a message is often more impactful than the words that you state. He said he appreciates those that have come up and been professional.

James Abercrombie said we have a decision making body and asked why don't we put some of these parks on school grounds. He said Mr. Mink was trying to investigate Ms. Liseo and embarrassed her and put her entire life out to the public. He said the Charter states he answers to the Board. He discussed approved agenda items and said that it was based upon the county manager and county attorney recommendations without research. He said it was done behind closed doors on Friday. He discussed an intersection on Deeson Road and the Ross Creek subdivision. He said every project has promised a traffic light on Kathleen Road at Deeson Road. He discussed people crossing busy lanes and having to make a u-turn.

Commissioner Scott said this has been a priority project for the county and involves multiple entities including CSX. He said we are encouraging CSX to move quickly with that.

P.2. Kevin Noble to discuss semi truck issues on Alturus Road & Alturus Loop Road

Minutes: Kevin Noble discussed semi truck traffic on Alturas Loop Road and Alturus Road. He said it is not safe for bicyclist. He discussed how he almost lost his life being run off the road by a semi. He said they need signs. He said they need to divert the semis and to make this safe. He asked to address this issue.

Commissioner Wilson said it is a lot less than it was and it is in the middle of citrus. He said a lot has changed and there is a lot of traffic moving out of that area.

County Manager Bill Beasley said maybe a speed feedback sign might be appropriate in a couple locations. He said along with that and a targeted enforcement with the Sheriff's office.

Chair Santiago said we will look into this. She adjourned the meeting at 10:46 a.m.