



Grand River Conservation Authority Minutes - General Membership Meeting

Date: September 27, 2024
Time: 9:30 am
Location: Hybrid Meeting of the General Membership
Members Present: Bruce Banbury, Christine Billings, John Challinor II, Ken Yee Chew, Brian Coleman, Doug Craig, Kevin Davis, Mike Devine, Jim Erb, Susan Foxton, Guy Gardhouse, Gord Greavette, Lisa Hern, Colleen James, Daniel Lawrence, Dave Miller, Rob Shirton, Jerry Smith, Shawn Watters, Chris White, Kari Williams, Alex Wilson, Pam Wolf
Regrets: Gino Caputo, Natasha Salonen, Sandy Shantz
Staff: Samantha Lawson, Karen Armstrong, Beth Brown, Krista Bunn, Joel Doherty, Brandon Heyer, Janet Ivey, Kayleigh Keighan, Murray Lister, Katelyn Lynch, Sonja Radoja, Lisa Stocco, Vahid Taleban, Pam Walther-Mabee, Mark Anderson, Benjamin Cheng, Melissa Larion, Nick Randle, Eowyn Spencer
Others: Dan Schneider

1. Call to Order

The Meeting was called to order by the Chair at 9:30 a.m.

2. Certification of Quorum

The Secretary-Treasurer certified quorum with more than half of the Members present. A total of 23 Members attended the meeting.

3. Chair's Remarks

The Chair welcomed the Members and made the following remarks:

- On September 19th the CAO and I attended a Melancton Township Council meeting to discuss conservation authority programs and municipal apportionment, and on September 23 Samantha attended the Township of Wilmot Council meeting to present the Conservation Areas draft strategy. A reminder that the survey for the draft strategy is open until October 4 and can be found on the GRCA's website.
- Also on September 23rd, Samantha attended Conservation Ontario Council, agenda highlights included discussion on policy guidance for administrative reviews of permits under section 28 of the CA Act, and Conservation Ontario's comments on provincial initiatives.
- The Lake Erie Region Source Protection Committee is actively recruiting economic sector representatives to join the Committee. Please feel free to share this information amongst your respective networks.
- Environment and Climate Change Canada has awarded the GRCA about half a million dollars over 4 years under the Great Lakes Freshwater Ecosystem Initiative. The funds will be used to support implementation of agricultural best practices to improve water quality in the Fairchild Creek and Nith River subwatersheds.

- On September 22, the GRCA hosted the Heritage River Festival at Brant Conservation Area to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Grand River's heritage river designation. The event comprised about 18 different activity booths and events hosted by local groups and sponsors and was well-received by the community and attendees. Thank you to many of our Board members who came out to visit and support the event, and thank you to Janet Ivey, Brant Conservation Area, and GRCA staff for organizing the festival.
- Two new Managers have joined the GRCA this month. Joel Doherty is the Manager of Conservation Lands, and Kayleigh Keighan is the new Manager of Finance.

K.Williams joined the meeting at 9:32 a.m.

4. Review of Agenda

24-136

Moved By Susan Foxtton

Seconded By Shawn Watters

THAT the agenda for the General Membership Meeting be approved as circulated.

Carried

5. Declarations of Pecuniary Interest

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests made in relation to the matters to be dealt with.

6. Minutes of the Previous Meetings

D.Miller expressed a concern that the attendance was not correctly recorded in August. Staff agreed to confirm the record following the meeting, and to follow up if needed.

A.Wilson and C.James joined the meeting at 9:48 a.m.

24-137

Moved By Kari Williams

Seconded By John Challinor II

THAT the minutes of the General Membership Meeting of August 23, 2024 be approved as circulated.

Carried

7. Business Arising from Previous Minutes

- D.Miller expressed a concern about agenda content and that some meeting dates potentially overlap with other events. The Chair noted that Board meeting dates are approved by the Board each year, and that agenda content is driven by ongoing projects and relevant regulatory requirements.
- P.Wolf inquired about the direction to staff to bring back a report regarding silt build-up near dams, and when that report can be expected. S.Lawson confirmed staff will bring the report before year-end.

8. Hearing of Delegations

8.a Dan Schneider - Outdoor Education Program Review

- Dan Schneider attended the Board meeting to share concerns regarding the Outdoor Education Program. The delegation shared photos of his time working as an environmental education specialist and discussed the overall importance of outdoor education and getting kids outside for hands-on learning experiences.
- The Chair thanked the delegation for his presentation, and there were no questions for staff.

9. Presentations

There were no Presentations.

10. Correspondence

24-138

Moved By Gord Greavette

Seconded By Shawn Watters

THAT Correspondence from Tom Woodcock on behalf of rare Charitable Research Reserve regarding Giant Hogweed, Christa Hesselink regarding conservation lands and delegations, and from the City of Guelph regarding their 2025 budget direction be received as information.

Carried

11. 1st and 2nd Reading of By-Laws

None.

12. Reports:

12.a GM-09-24-78 - Outdoor Environmental Education Program - Update

- The Chair provided a brief reminder of the ongoing discussions related to the various nature centre properties, noting further discussion is required. The Chair added that the GRCA has no intention of ending the outdoor education program, only that in some cases it may move out of current locations.
- K.Davis thanked the delegation for the presentation and emphasized the importance of these programs. He added appreciation for staff for extending the timeline to ensure all options are being thoroughly considered and noted he is optimistic about the outcome for the properties.
- R.Shirton asked about communications with Haldimand Council, and S.Lawson confirmed that additional information was provided earlier in the year. S.Lawson will follow up to confirm receipt.

24-139

Moved By Jerry Smith

Seconded By John Challinor II

THAT the Grand River Conservation Authority extend the deadline regarding the potential options for the Apps' Mill, Laurel Creek, and Taquanyah nature centres from September 2024 to March 2025 to allow staff to continue discussions with municipalities, school boards and other agencies.

Carried

12.b GM-09-24-80 - By-law Update - Delegations

The Chair noted this amendment includes an update to the delegation section, and that the change to one vice-chair section will be updated before the next Board election.

24-140

Moved By Pam Wolf

Seconded By Rob Shirton

WHEREAS By-law 2-2024 was read a first and second time at the General Membership meeting on August 23, 2024; and staff were directed to make amendments based on discussion at the meeting

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT By-law 2-2024 be read a third time and adopted by the General Membership effective September 27, 2024;

AND THAT a copy of By-law 2-2024 be forwarded to the Ministry of Natural Resources and posted on the Grand River Conservation Authority's website.

Carried

12.c GM-09-24-77 - Budget 2025 - Timelines and Considerations

- S.Radoja presented an overview of the considerations and timeline for the 2025 Budget. The presentation highlighted challenges anticipated in 2025, initial assumptions for the

operating and capital budget, as well as special project budgets and plans for offsetting expenditures where applicable.

- The presentation highlighted an initial apportionment estimate, which will be refined and presented to the Board for approval in January, and an overall timeline for draft Budget presentation, apportionment approval, municipal notification, and final approval.
- J.Challinor thanked staff and discussed cost-recovery targets for planning and regulations fees, and how we compare to similar organizations. J.Challinor asked if there should be consideration to discuss fee freezes with the Minister, in cases where the GRCA falls short of cost-recovery, and noted that it is not a sustainable policy direction.
- S.Lawson confirmed that direction to freeze fees will impact any increases intended to reach cost-recovery for services, and added that it is difficult to predict but once confirmed the decision will inform future budget assumptions. S.Lawson added that there is some related discussion happening at Conservation Ontario Council. J.Challinor suggested including a motion with the September draft Budget to send correspondence to the Minister regarding the impact of the fee freeze. S.Foxton echoed this sentiment, noting she will be requesting the same at the Region of Waterloo.
- D.Lawrence asked about cost-recovery targets for outdoor education, and the Chair noted that the concerns there are what have been driving further conversations with external agencies, as staff had recommended moving the program to operate from within Conservation Areas to reduce the deficit in a move towards break-even operations. S.Lawson noted that the Transition Reserve was developed to support the transition to the category 1, 2, and 3 budget framework, and that it will be used to address the deficit for that program in 2025.

24-141

Moved By Brian Coleman

Seconded By Bruce Banbury

THAT Report Number GM-09-24-77 - Budget 2025 – Timelines and Preliminary Considerations be received as information.

Carried

12.d GM-09-24-75 - Cash and Investment Status

There were no questions or comments on this item.

24-142

Moved By Christine Billings

Seconded By Gord Greavette

THAT Report Number GM-09-24-75 – Cash and Investment Status – August 2024 be received as information.

Carried

12.e GM-09-24-84 - Financial Summary

There were no questions or comments on this item.

24-143

Moved By Bruce Banbury

Seconded By Daniel Lawrence

THAT the Financial Summary for the period ending August 31, 2024 be approved.

Carried

12.f GM-09-24-79 - 2024 Road Site Preparation and Surface Treatment Contract Increase

There were no questions or comments on this item.

24-144

Moved By Brian Coleman

Seconded By Jerry Smith

THAT the Grand River Conservation Authority increase the Cornell Construction contract value by \$130,357.00 for the 2024 Road Site Preparation and Surface Treatment to align with the completed essential road repairs on GRCA properties throughout the watershed.

Carried

12.g GM-09-24-81 - Planning and Regulations Fees Guidance

- B.Brown provided an overview of regulated fees charged by conservation authorities for permit and plan review services, and provided some background information on the historical direction to achieve 50% cost-recovery for these services for permitting and 100% for some plan review services.
- The presentation also highlighted a consultant review of the fees and subsequent recommendations to increase fees and cost-recovery targets and discussed the Minister's direction received by conservation authorities in 2022 and 2023 to freeze all permit and plan review fees for the 2023 and 2024 budgets. The GRCA's 2022 fees were approved prior to the Minister's direction so an increase was implemented for the 2023 fees.
- Prior to planning for the 2025 budget and fees increase, staff are seeking guidance from the Board on the cost-recovery targets, and the approach to be taken to increasing fees.
- Board Members had questions regarding fees charged, environmental assessment review services provided, where the GRCA fees measure on a comparable scale, and differences in the Grand River watershed that may set this fee structure apart from similar organizations. It was recommended that an external fee review be done on a periodic basis, such as every 5 years.
- K.Davis provided suggestions to include additional information on a subsequent report to help inform the decision-making process, and suggested a deferral of the current motion.
- B.Brown responded to questions, noting that additional information can be provided as requested.

24-145

Moved By Pam Wolf

Seconded By John Challinor II

THAT staff be directed to implement a cost recovery target of 65% for Regulations fees;

AND THAT staff be directed to implement a cost recovery target of 100% for Plan Review fees.

Defeated

Moved By Kevin Davis

Seconded By Brian Coleman

THAT staff be directed to bring forward to the October Board meeting, as part of the 2025 Budget process, a revised report for a suggested permit and plan review fee schedule, to include the following :

- A fee structure demonstrating an immediate move to 85% cost recovery on standard fees;
- A plan or a timetable to achieve 100% cost recovery within a reasonable timeframe;
- Actual comparable fees charged for similar services in other Conservation Authorities;
- Potential fees to be charged for Environmental Assessment services.

Carried

12.h GM-09-24-74 - ERO Posting 019-8463 - Decision - Updated Provincial Planning Statement

There were no questions or comments on this item.

24-147

Moved By Kari Williams

Seconded By Daniel Lawrence

THAT Report Number GM-09-24-74 ERO Posting 019-8462 Decision - Updated Provincial Planning Statement be received as information.

Carried

B.Coleman left the meeting at 10:54 a.m.

12.i GM-09-24-76 - Speed River Hydrology Contract

There were no questions or comments on this item.

24-148

Moved By Susan Foxtan

Seconded By Colleen James

THAT the Grand River Conservation Authority accept the bid from Matrix Solutions Inc. to carry out the Speed River Hydrologic Model Development at a cost of \$109,664 (excluding HST);

AND THAT a contingency of 10% be included in the overall project budget for a total project budget of \$120,630 (excluding HST).

Carried

S.Foxtan took a brief pause in the meeting to share condolences for Jack Griffin. Jack was a long-term employee dedicated to the GRCA and Pinehurst Lake Conservation Area, and recently passed. The Board offered condolences to Jack's family.

12.j GM-09-24-82 - GRCA Reservoir Operations Policy

- V.Taleban provided a presentation on the updated Reservoir Operations Policy, which has been updated as part of the regulatory deliverables under Ontario Regulation 686/21.
- The presentation provided background on the development of the original policy in 1974 and discussed the established target levels for the GRCA-owned and operated reservoirs.
- There was also information provided with respect to changing trends in annual flooding periods, climate change and its impact on flood operations, and provided a summary of flooding and water flow data collected over 30-40 years at various points in the watershed, which illustrates the changing weather trends.
- Following the presentation, D.Miller inquired about the purpose of updating the policy, and if climate change was a driving factor. V.Taleban noted that the policy is a regulatory deliverable, but climate change was considered as the required update provided an opportunity to include current data.

24-149

Moved By Susan Foxtan

Seconded By Pam Wolf

THAT the Grand River Conservation Authority Reservoir Operations Policy be approved.

Carried

12.k GM-09-24-85 - Current Watershed Conditions

There were no questions or comments on this item.

24-150

Moved By Guy Gardhouse

Seconded By Lisa Hern

THAT Report Number GM-09-28-85 – Current Watershed Conditions as of September 17, 2024 be received as information.

Carried

D.Lawrence left the meeting at 11:15 a.m.

12.1 GM-09-24-83 - Unauthorized Encampments on GRCA Properties

- P.Walther-Mabee provided a presentation on encampments on GRCA properties. The presentation highlighted a significant increase in encampments, in particular at Dumfries Conservation Area, and the impact on staff resources, expenses for clean-up and hiring additional staff and security, health and safety concerns for staff, and procedures in place to manage the encampments.
- There was information about next steps, which include developing clarity in responsibilities and protocol support from other agencies and looking into multi-agency committees with partner municipalities facing similar challenges.
- Board Members discussed the concerns related to the unauthorized use of properties and inquired about the current process, financial restitution options, operational budget impact or future estimates, and consideration of social services and support for individuals experiencing homelessness.
- P.Walther-Mabee and S.Lawson responded to questions, noting that evictions are handled with respect and professionalism and are coordinated with other agencies to provide additional support to impacted individuals, and that ongoing challenges are expected, but are difficult to estimate as there are many factors that drive the placement of unauthorized campsites.
- Board members suggested identifying a key staff contact to improve inter-agency communications and creating a dedicated budget line to manage site clean-ups.

24-151

Moved By Susan Foxtton

Seconded By Mike Devine

THAT Report Number GM-08-24-83 – Unauthorized Tenting on GRCA Properties be received as information.

Carried

13. Committee of the Whole

Not required.

14. General Business

There was no General Business.

15. 3rd Reading of By-Laws

Completed previously.

16. Other Business

None.

17. Closed Meeting

24-152

Moved By Kari Williams

Seconded By Jerry Smith

THAT the General Membership enter a closed meeting in accordance with the Municipal Act section 239(2) for the following purpose(s): security of property, labour relations or employee negotiations, and litigation or potential litigation.

Carried

K.Davis, M.Devine, and K.Williams left the meeting during the closed session.

24-153

Moved By John Challinor II

Seconded By Susan Foxtan

THAT the General Membership reconvene in open session.

Carried

18. Next Meeting - Friday, October 25, 2024 at 9:30 a.m. (Hybrid)

19. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 12:10 p.m.

24-154

Moved By Susan Foxtan

Seconded By Guy Gardhouse

THAT the General Membership Meeting be adjourned.

Carried

Chair

Secretary-Treasurer