



Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority

Minutes – Board of Directors Meeting

Date: Thursday May 15, 2025, 1:00 PM

Location: 1078 Bruce Rd 12, Formosa, ON, N0G 1W0

Chair: Tom Hutchinson

Members present: Paul Allen, Larry Allison, Barbara Dobreen, Bud Halpin, Greg McLean, Dave Myette, Mike Niesen, Moiken Penner, Bill Stewart, Kevin Eccles, Sue Paterson, Jennifer Prenger

Members absent: Peter Whitten, Steve McCabe

Staff present: Adam Chalmers, Erik Downing, Donna Lacey, Don Moss, Matt Armstrong, Darren Kenny, Ashley Richards, Kelly Ray, Brandi Walter, Karleigh Porter

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 PM.

1. Land Acknowledgement – read by Greg McLean

We begin our meeting today by respectfully acknowledging the Anishinaabeg Nation, the Haudenosaunee, the Neutral, and the Petun peoples as the traditional keepers of this land. We are committed to moving forward in the spirit of reconciliation with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples.

2. Adoption of Agenda

Motion #G25-41

Moved by Bill Stewart

Seconded by Mike Niesen

THAT the agenda for the Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority meeting, May 15, 2025, be adopted as amended.

Carried

3. Declaration of Pecuniary Interest

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest relative to any item on the agenda.

4. Adoption of Minutes

4.1 Authority meeting – March 20, 2025

Motion #G25-42

Moved by Dave Myette

Seconded by Greg McLean

THAT the minutes of the Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority meeting, March 20, 2025, be adopted as presented.

Carried

5. Staff Introductions:

A new staff member was introduced to the Board, specifically a Regulations Officer who joined SVCA on an 8-month contract.

6. Matters Arising from the Minutes – none

7. New Business

7.1 GM-2025-05: SVCA Operational Plan

The General Manager/Secretary-Treasurer (GM/S-T) presented the 2025 SVCA Workplan, noting the red in the legend indicates new items, or changes to existing items. Director Dobreen inquired as to the status of the Workplace Culture Assessment; GM/S-T indicated that phase 1 is underway and that the Joint Health and Safety Committee is in the process of reviewing draft policies related to health and safety.

7.2 GM-2025-06 Program Report

The Board received a comprehensive Programs Report outlining recent activity across departments. During the reporting period, SVCA staff participated in numerous strategic meetings and initiatives, including training with Conservation Ontario, municipal delegations on floodplain mapping, and leadership development programs. Staff presented to West Grey Council, attended the Grey-Bruce Federation of Agriculture's Politicians Day, and supported multiple watershed and government relations efforts. A meeting with MPP Paul Vickers focused on SVCA agriculture collaboration, and the annual Arbour Day Tree Sale drew significant public turnout. Additionally, Conservation Ontario discussions included legislative updates following the provincial Throne Speech.

Corporate Services completed year-end reporting requirements and continues to support organizational priorities including summer student recruitment, signage planning for SVCA's 75th anniversary, and campground preparations. Forestry staff advanced forest inventory work and tree planting and welcomed a new Forestry Technician to the staff. Environmental Planning launched the CA Core content management system and finalized the updated Policies Manual. Water Resources progressed on dam safety projects, frazil ice response planning, and flood forecasting. Communications saw strong digital engagement from January to May 2025, with nearly 1 million views across platforms.

Director Eccles inquired whether the meeting with MPP Paul Vickers included an opportunity to request additional funding. Chair Hutchinson confirmed that this matter was raised during the discussion. The General Manager/Secretary-Treasurer added that the meeting was primarily intended as a relationship-building opportunity. Director Dobreen inquired whether a meeting had been requested with the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. Chair Hutchinson responded that a meeting has not yet been requested but confirmed that one will be pursued.

7.3 Correspondence – none

7.4 COR-2025-13: 2024 Audited Financial Statements

Corporate Services Manager Chalmers introduced John Bujold, B.Sc., CPA, CA from Baker Tilly SGB, LLP. The audited financial statements of Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority for the year ended December 31, 2024, were prepared in accordance with Canadian public sector accounting standards and received an unqualified opinion from the external auditors, Baker Tilly SGB LLP. The audit confirmed that the financial statements fairly present the Authority's financial position, operations, and cash flows for the year. The Authority ended the year with an annual surplus of \$468,710, bringing its accumulated surplus to \$14,052,631. The audit emphasized management's responsibility for internal controls and noted no material misstatements.

The Authority reported total revenues of \$6,123,013 and total expenses of \$5,654,303, with higher-than-budgeted revenues primarily from special programs and investment income. Significant reserves were maintained across operational areas, and capital assets remained a major component of the Authority's financial position. The auditors found no remeasurement gains or losses and confirmed compliance with ethical and professional standards throughout the audit process.

Motion #G25-43

Moved by Paul Allen

Seconded by Barbara Dobreen

THAT the draft financial statements from Baker Tilly, SGB, LLP, be approved as presented.

Carried

7.5 EPR-2025-05: Environmental Planning and Regulations Policy Manual

Manager Armstrong presented the final draft of the updated Environmental Planning and Regulations Policies Manual, which incorporated feedback from a public consultation period held between December 2024 and February 2025. A total of 218 comments were received and reviewed, resulting in substantial improvements to the manual's clarity, alignment with legislation, and accessibility. The revised manual reflects SVCA's regulatory responsibilities under Ontario Regulation 41/24, includes technical and formatting updates, and is recommended for immediate implementation.

Director Dobreen inquired whether the document could be considered a "living document," and Manager Armstrong confirmed that it is. He explained that as regulations evolve, the document will be updated accordingly, with significant changes requiring consultation and other revisions made at the direction of the SVCA Board of Directors.

Motion #G25-44

Moved by Larry Allison

Seconded by Bud Halpin

THAT the Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority approve the updated draft Environmental Planning and Regulations Policies Manual and direct staff to begin using the manual.

Carried

7.6 EPR-2025-06: Status of Active Violations

Regulations Coordinator Kenny presented an update on the status of active violations under Ontario Regulation 169/06 and Ontario Regulation 41/24. As of April 28, 2025, SVCA staff are managing 54 active violation files, a reduction of 14 since the previous update in November 2024. Most files fall into categories where the activities are either compliant or resolvable through technical reporting, with no violations currently rated as posing imminent and significant damage. Two files remain before Provincial Offences Court, with one decision rendered in SVCA's favour and the other pending trial.

Director Stewart inquired whether SVCA can benefit from court fees through the litigation process. Regulations Coordinator Kenny responded that while the presiding Justice determines the awarding of court fees, SVCA can advocate for their recovery but does not have the authority to dictate the outcome. Director Myette asked how violations are brought to the attention of SVCA staff. Coordinator Kenny confirmed that most violations are reported by neighbouring landowners, though some are self-reported or identified by municipal building officials. He added that on occasion, staff become aware of violations while performing their regular duties but are not actively seeking them out.

7.7 EPR-2025-07: Permits Issued for Endorsement

Motion #G25-45

Moved by Bud Halpin

Seconded by Sue Paterson

THAT SVCA permit applications 25-026 to 25-046 as approved by staff, be endorsed by the SVCA Board of Directors.

Carried

7.8 LAN-2025-02: Fencing at Durham Conservation Area

Manager Donna Lacey informed the Board about the installation of a section of fence at Durham Conservation Area. The fence is intended to support enforcement of Ontario Regulation 688/21 by restricting unauthorized access during posted closure hours and ensuring compliance with designated day-use requirements. Ongoing issues such as nighttime trespassing, unpaid access, and informal use as a thoroughfare have prompted this response, with the aim of improving safety, reducing environmental impacts, and protecting SVCA's operational integrity.

The fence will help deter vandalism, theft, and littering, clarify expectations for law enforcement and visitors, and support staff safety. Fees for access remain modest compared to other conservation authorities, and a new initiative will see three free annual passes made available at local libraries to help remove financial barriers for community members.

To ensure transparency and community understanding, SVCA has launched an outreach and communication campaign, which has included a letter to West Grey Council, and will encompass neighborhood flyers, local media releases, social media posts, and updates to signage and the SVCA website. The initiative reflects a balanced approach to public access, regulatory compliance, and responsible land management.

7.9 LAN-2025-03: Options for Future Management of Varney Conservation Area

At its May 5, 2025 meeting, the SVCA Property and Parks Committee unanimously recommended Option 4, disposal of the Varney Conservation Area, as the preferred course of action for the management of Varney Conservation Area. This decision followed long standing concern about the property's safety risks, structural deficiencies, and unsustainable financial demands. External engineering assessments confirmed serious infrastructure issues, including past drownings, safety hazards, and regulatory compliance barriers. Given that Varney is a non-revenue property with no viable cost recovery mechanism, the committee determined that disposal is in SVCA's best long-term interest.

The GM/S-T reviewed SVCA's Land Acquisition Policy to ensure the proposed disposal aligns with SVCA's mandate and current procedures. The policy outlines three conditions for disposal: a recommendation from the Property and Parks Committee (fulfilled), a review of the original purchase agreement to determine if conservation conditions exist (none found), and confirmation that the disposal is consistent with SVCA's objectives and long-term purpose. All requirements have been met.

During the meeting, Director Dobreen, through a point of order, reminded the Board that discussions related to the review process, including any questions about potential municipal interest in acquiring the property, will take place in-camera to ensure confidentiality and compliance with governance protocols.

During the discussion, two motions were withdrawn as the Board worked collaboratively to develop a final motion. The first was a motion from Director Myette, seconded by Director McLean, to identify Option 4 as the direction for SVCA staff to pursue. The second was a motion from Director Dobreen, seconded by Director Prenger, to amend the language from "proceed" to "explore."

The Board of Directors ultimately approved a final motion directing staff to proceed with exploring the disposal of Varney Conservation Area. Next steps will include a comprehensive review process involving legal counsel, an updated property appraisal, coordination with relevant regulatory agencies, and the development of a public communications plan that includes public meetings to ensure transparency and engagement.

Motion #G25-46

Moved by Moiken Penner

Seconded by Jennifer Prenger

THAT the SVCA Board of Directors receive the recommendation of the SVCA Property and Parks Committee; and FURTHER THAT staff be directed to proceed with exploring disposal of the Varney Conservation Area in whole, or in part.

Carried

7.10 LAN-2025-04: Staff Provincial Offences Officer Designation

Staff recommended, and the Board approved, the designation two SVCA staff as Provincial Offences Officers for the enforcement of Section 29 of the Conservation Authorities Act. Both staff

members meet the required training and experience criteria, and the designations carry no new financial implications beyond previously incurred costs.

Motion #G25-47

Moved by Barbara Dobreen

Seconded by Bud Halpin

THAT SVCA Assistant Park Superintendent, Saugeen Bluffs, Mary Lyness and Lands Technician, Nicholas Kunkel be designated by the SVCA Board of Directors as Provincial Offences Officers for the purpose of enforcing Section 29 of the Conservation Authorities Act.

Carried

8. Adjournment

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 3:20 PM, following a motion by Sue Paterson and seconded by Jennifer Prenger.

Tom Hutchinson
Chair

Ashley Richards
in lieu of Recording Secretary