



Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority

Minutes – Board of Directors Meeting

Date: Thursday January, 15, 1:00 p.m.

Location: Virtual

Chair: Tom Hutchinson

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

Steve McCabe left the meeting at 4:00pm

Staff present: Erik Downing, Donna Lacey, Matt Armstrong, Katie Thomas, Ashley Richards, Brandi Walter, Izabela Polowa, Curtis Weber

Guests present: Robert Uhrig, Tim Lanthier, Ed McGugan, Jack Van Dorp, Kenneth Craig, Phil Beard

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 pm

1. Land Acknowledgement – read by Peter Whitten

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 #G26-01

Moved by Peter Whitten

Seconded by Moiken Penner

THAT the agenda for the Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority meeting, January 15, 2026, be adopted.

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 November 20, 2025

Motion #G26-02

Moved by Peter Whitten

Seconded by Barbara Dobreen

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

Carried

5. Introduction of guests

Kenneth Craig thanked his representatives for their support and dedication. He expressed gratitude concerning being part of the Conservation Authority and appreciates the opportunity to contribute to its important work. Robert Uhrig expressed gratitude to SVCA for the hard work done through the and conveyed greetings from the Municipality of Meaford and the Grey Sauble Conservation Authority Board of Directors.

Ed McGugan congratulated Conservation Authority on their 75th anniversary, and conveyed greetings from the Maitland Valley Conservation Authority.

Phil Beard offered greetings from the Maitland Valley Conservation Authority.

Tim Lanthier conveyed greetings from the Grey Sauble Conservation Authority and expressed appreciation to Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority for its work. He noted that Grey Sauble shares the same vision and goals and looks forward to continued communication, engagement, and future collaboration.

Jack Van Dorp extended greetings from the Bruce County and thanked SVCA for all their work.

Kenneth Melanson shared greetings from Township of Southgate, and region.

6. Staff introduction

The Board of Directors were introduced to the new corporate services accounting clerk, and the new acting manager of corporate services.

7. Chair's address

The Chair acknowledged the collective efforts of member municipalities, the Board, staff, partner conservation authorities, and watershed taxpayers in supporting the work of Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority. The address noted recent provincial announcements regarding conservation authority amalgamation, expressed disappointment with potential impacts to local governance, and reaffirmed pride in SVCA's 75-year legacy of partnership-driven conservation, flood protection, planning support, and land stewardship. The Chair emphasized the enduring value of local decision-making, the importance of municipal and community partnerships, and appreciation for the continued trust placed in SVCA regardless of future provincial direction.

8. GM's address

The General Manager reported that 2025 was a productive year marked by measurable progress across all departments, driven by staff adaptability, collaboration, and continued delivery of core programs and services. Highlights included advancements in planning systems and outreach, significant forestry and conservation area improvements, expanded flood forecasting and water resource infrastructure, and ongoing delivery of Category 1, 2, and 3 programs in partnership with municipalities and stakeholders. The address concluded by recognizing staff professionalism and emphasizing the importance of maintaining balance between long-term planning and responsive operational work as the organization moves forward.

9. Election of officers

9.1 Appointment of Chair Pro Tem

Motion #G26-03

Moved by Barbara Dobreen

Seconded by Kevin Eccles

THAT Rob Uhrig be appointed as Chair Pro Tem for the purposes of conducting the election of officers for 2026.

Carried

9.2 Appointment of Scrutineers

Motion #G26-04

Moved by Larry Allison

Seconded by Bud Halpin

THAT Tim Lanthier and Phil Beard be appointed as scrutineers for the election of officers as conducted on January 15, 2026.

Carried

9.3 Election of Chair

Motion #G26-05

Moved by Steve McCabe

Seconded by Gregory McLean

THAT the nominations for the position of Chair of the Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority for 2026 be closed.

Carried

Tom Hutchinson was elected by acclamation as Chair of the Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority for 2026.

9.4 Election of Vice Chair

Motion #G26-06

Moved by Mike Nielsen

Seconded by Dave Myette

THAT the nominations for the position of Vice Chair of the Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority for 2026 be closed.

Carried

Greg McLean was elected by acclamation as a Vice Chair of the Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority for 2026.

9.5 Election of 2nd Vice Chair

Motion #G26-07

Moved by Peter Whitten

Seconded by Gregory McLean

THAT the nominations for the position of 2nd Vice Chair of the Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority for 2026 be closed.

Carried

Sue Paterson was elected 2nd Vice Chair.

The election of a Member-at-Large was not required, as Past Chair Dobreen chose to remain on the Board. In accordance with governance procedure, when the previous Chair remains on the Board, the position of Past Chair is assumed automatically and an election for Member-at-Large is therefore unnecessary.

10. Committee Appointments

Motion #G26-08

Moved by Barbara Dobreen

Seconded by Larry Allison

THAT the following Directors be appointed as members to the SVCA committees for 2026:

Forestry Committee: Barbara Dobreen, Bud Halpin, Sue Paterson, and Moiken Penner.

Property and Parks Committee: Moiken Penner, Paul Allen, Larry Allison, Kevin Eccles, and Jennifer Prenger.

Water Resources Committee: Gregory McLean, Bill Stewart, Mike Niesen, and Bud Halpin.

Agricultural Advisory Committee: Steve McCabe, Dave Myette, Mike Niesen, and Jennifer Prenger.

Carried

11. New Business

11.1 GM-2026-01: Program Report

The General Manager reported active participation in provincial and regional discussions regarding the proposed amalgamation of conservation authorities, including meetings with MECP, Conservation Ontario, neighbouring authorities, and municipal partners. Engagement also included committee meetings, training, administrative reviews, and media outreach related to flood preparedness and governance matters. Director McCabe informed the Board that he will be attending the ROMA conference on Sunday, January 18, 2026, where conservation authorities will have the opportunity to ask questions regarding the proposed amalgamation.

Director McLean reiterated the importance of collaboration among local authorities and expressed his appreciation to everyone for their support.

Director Whitten expressed gratitude to the GM/S-T, Erik Downing, for his hard work and ongoing support.

It was reported that the Corporate Services Department experienced a transition in December due to a staff departure, and Ashley Richards was appointed Acting Manager of Corporate Services. In this role, she is overseeing contracted accounting support to address reconciliation requirements, while also managing a communications contractor and working with current full-time permanent staff to ensure continuity of operations. The team have already addressed high priority deliverables, including payroll reconciliation, updates to taxable benefits, arrears, invoicing, and payment adjustments, to maintain stability and keep Corporate Services on track heading into 2026. Environmental Planning and Regulations advanced regulation mapping updates, planning agreement revisions, floodplain mapping consultation, and targeted outreach to Amish and Mennonite communities. Between October 23 and December 31, 2025, staff issued 29 permits across multiple watershed municipalities.

Forestry and Lands staff addressed unauthorized camping incidents, completed site cleanups, and continued hazard tree removal and private property forestry services. Infrastructure

improvements progressed at conservation areas, including the opening of the vault privy at Stoney Island, ongoing hydro expansion work, increased winter maintenance, and responses to property information requests.

Water Resources staff issued a Watershed Conditions Statement in response to forecasted warm temperatures and rainfall and completed annual Flood Watch training for staff. Snow surveys and ice monitoring commenced for the season, including daily monitoring of frazil ice conditions in Durham to inform flood risk.

Category 2 agreements continued, with the Arran-Elderslie agreement finalized and associated works underway. Staff advanced multiple capital and safety projects, including CCTV inspections, dam safety upgrades, tree remediation studies, infrastructure inspections, and development of standardized operating procedures.

Water Quality staff continued municipal delegations related to the 20-Year Water Quality Report and completed seasonal groundwater and surface water sampling programs. Upcoming work includes winter sampling, quality assurance review of 2025 data, and updates to the annual report and online dashboard.

11.2 GM-2026-02: SVCA Workplan

The GM/S-T reported that the Water Resources team finalized Category 2 agreements in November.

The October 6, 2024, lightning strike at the Formosa office and the status of restoration work were noted by Director Eccles, who inquired why the matter had not yet been fully completed. The GM/Secretary-Treasurer advised that additional work remains outstanding, including stump removal and electrical repairs, and that the insurance claim process has not yet been finalized.

11.3 GM-2026-03: SVCA Meeting Schedule

Motion #G26-09

Moved by Peter Whitten

Seconded by Dave Myette

THAT the 2026 SVCA Authority meeting and Section 28 Hearing schedule be adopted as presented.

Carried

The Board approved the 2026 SVCA Authority Meeting and Section 28 Hearing schedules as presented. It was noted that a revised meeting date for March will be selected and brought forward for confirmation.

11.4 CS-2026-01: 2026 SVCA Budget

Motion #G26-10

Moved by Dave Myette

Seconded by Kevin Eccles

THAT the apportionment amount of \$2,829,657 for Category 1 operating expenses and capital costs be approved in accordance with Ontario Regulation 401/22, Section 27(4) of the Conservation Authorities Act;

THAT the Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority adopt the 2026 Budget in the amount of \$6,493,483 as approved in principle, November 20, 2025; and

FURTHER THAT the General Manager/Secretary-Treasurer is hereby authorized to notify the member municipalities of the cost apportioning amounts owing; and

FURTHER THAT cost apportioning payments shall be due from member municipalities in two equal instalments on March 31 and June 30, 2026, and that late payments shall be subject to the Authority’s standard late payment charge of 1.50% per month thereafter.

Carried

Recorded Vote, 100% attendance, all voted in favour:

Municipality	Director	Yea
Arran-Elderslie	Moiken Penner	X
Brockton	Gregory McLean	X
Chatsworth	Peter Whitten	X
Grey-Highlands	Paul Allen	X
Hanover	Sue Paterson	X
Howick	Mike Niesen	X
Huron-Kinloss	Larry Allison	X
Kincardine	Jennifer Prenger	X
Kincardine	Bill Stewart	X
Minto	Steve McCabe	X
Morris-Turnberry	Mike Niesen	X
Saugeen Shores	Bud Halpin	X
Saugeen Shores	Dave Myette	X
South Bruce	Mike Niesen	X
Southgate	Barbara Dobreen	X
Wellington North	Steve McCabe	X
West Grey	Tom Hutchinson	X
West Grey	Kevin Eccles	X

The Board received a report from the General Manager/Secretary-Treasurer seeking approval of the 2026 SVCA budget, which includes a total budget of \$6,493,483 and an apportionment increase of 1.6 percent, representing the lowest increase approved in the past five years. The budget maintains all current programs and service levels through internal cost containment, reserve use, and operational efficiencies, while authorizing notification to member municipalities and establishing payment timelines for 2026.

11.5 COR-2026-02: Statutory Administrative Approvals

Motion #G26-11

Moved by Steve McCabe
 Seconded by Mike Niesen

THAT Recommendation: THAT the Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority Board of Directors re-affirm for 2026 the Health and Safety Policy; and

FURTHER THAT the Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority Board of Directors Re-Affirm for 2026 the Workplace Violence, Harassment, and Sexual Harassment Policy.

Carried

11.6 Appointment of Auditor

Motion #G26-12

Moved by Barbara Dobreen

Seconded by Sue Paterson

THAT Baker Tilly SGB LLP be confirmed as the auditor to the Authority for the year 2026.

Carried

Director Eccles inquired why the Conservation Authority is not seeking a new auditor, noting that Baker Tilly has served as auditor for the Authority for multiple years.

The General Manager/Secretary-Treasurer suggested that the existing purchasing policy, or the Administrative Bylaws, could be amended to specify a defined term for external auditors.

11.7 Appointment of Solicitor

Motion #G26-13

Moved by Bill Stewart

Seconded by Steve McCabe

THAT Beard Winter LLP, Loucks and Loucks LLP, and Mathews, Dinsdale & Clark LLP be appointed solicitors to the Authority for the year 2026 for general operations, with the option to engage the services of other local solicitors, as necessary.

Carried

Inquiry was made about the reasons the Authority retains three solicitors and whether SVCA pays retainer fees to each. The General Manager/Secretary-Treasurer explained that each solicitor provides expertise in different areas of law required by the Authority, including employment and labour relations, real estate and land transactions, environmental and regulatory matters, planning and development, expropriation, liability, and risk management. It was further noted that legal services are provided on an as-needed basis without retainer fees, and that a combination of local and specialized counsel allows SVCA to address both regional matters and highly technical files effectively. Director Eccles suggested that the Authority consider retaining a single solicitor beginning in 2027.

11.8 EPR-2026-01: EPR Correspondence

The Board received a report from the Manager of Environmental Planning and Regulations outlining the rationale for discontinuing the practice of copying Directors on planning and regulation correspondence. The report referenced legal advice received during Section 28 Hearing training indicating that providing Directors with advance knowledge of active files could create a reasonable apprehension of bias should a matter proceed to a Hearing and noted that this practice ceased on September 19, 2025.

The report further advised that Conservation Ontario confirmed copying Directors on such correspondence is not standard practice among conservation authorities and occurs infrequently, and that of four neighbouring authorities contacted, three do not copy Directors on permits or planning comment letters. During discussion, Director Dobreen expressed concern and requested additional information, noting uncertainty about how she would respond if contacted regarding a

potential violation outside regular business hours without prior knowledge of the file. The General Manager/Secretary-Treasurer advised that Directors are not expected to respond to enforcement or compliance matters, which remain operational responsibilities of staff, and noted that this approach is consistent with municipal practices where councillors are not involved in permitting or enforcement decisions.

11.9 EPR-2026-02: Bruce County MOU

Motion #G26-14

Moved by Larry Allison

Seconded by Mike Niesen

THAT Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority endorse the updated Memorandum of Understanding for Planning Review Services Between SVCA and the County of Bruce;

and THAT the updated Memorandum of Understanding be circulated to Bruce County Council for review and approval.

Carried

The Board received a report from the SVCA Planning Coordinator, seeking endorsement of an updated Memorandum of Understanding between SVCA and the County of Bruce for planning review services related to natural hazards under the Planning Act. The updated MOU reflects legislative changes under the Conservation Authorities Act and O. Reg. 686/21, clarifies roles, fees, and service standards, and replaces the previous 2019 agreement. Upon endorsement, the MOU will be circulated to Bruce County Council for review and approval.

11.10 EPR-2026-03: Amendments to 2026 EPR Fee Schedule

Motion #G26-15

Moved by Bill Stewart

Seconded by Bud Halpin

THAT the Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority board of directors approve the proposed amendments to the 2026 Environmental Planning and Regulations Fee Schedule;

THAT should Conservation Authorities receive provincial direction to alter Fees, that SVCA staff implement those changes, as required.

Carried

The Board received a report from the Manager of Environmental Planning and Regulations regarding proposed amendments to the 2026 EPR Fee Schedule. The report noted that in November 2023 the Board had previously approved fee increases representing approximately 50 percent of the increases recommended through the Watsons and Associates fee review, but those approved fees were not implemented due to subsequent provincial fee freezes.

The report outlined that continued freezes in 2023, 2024, and 2025 have significantly impacted EPR revenue and delayed progress toward cost recovery. Staff recommended amending the 2026 fee schedule to partially address this gap while avoiding undue burden on applicants, with flexibility to implement any future provincial direction if required.

Director Dobreen questioned the proposed fee increases and raised concerns regarding how the increases would be communicated to the public, requesting further clarification within the Watsons and Associates fee review regarding the rationale for the recommended increases. She also expressed the view that provincial direction on the fee freeze was open ended; however, Manager Armstrong clarified by referencing the provincial direction, which confirmed that the freeze was not indefinite and expired on December 31, 2025.

Director Halpin commented that while fee increases may be unpopular, development-related costs and the use of land must be appropriately funded. Director Dobreen further inquired about the cost of additional staffing and the potential impact on the Authority's budget, and the General Manager/Secretary-Treasurer advised that the staffing changes could be accommodated should the proposed fee increases be approved.

Concerns were expressed regarding the timing of implementation, and Director Dobreen subsequently brought forward a motion to implement the revised fees effective March 1, 2026.

Motion #G26-16

Moved by Barbara Dobreen

Seconded by Dave Myette

THAT the effective date for the implementation of the 2026 SVCA Planning and Regulations Fee Schedule be March 1, 2026, for communication to member municipalities.

Carried

11.11 LAN-2026-01: SVCSV Agreement Review

The Board received an update regarding the renewal of the lease agreement with the Saugeen Valley Children's Safety Village, including revisions to address operational, safety, and site management considerations. During discussion, Director Dobreen inquired why the agreement no longer permits the subleasing of the facility, and staff explained that the organization does not pay rent for either the Children's Safety Village facility or the surrounding Sulphur Spring Conservation Area lands, and that allowing unrestricted third-party rentals would be inconsistent with SVCA's role and the intent of the lease; the revised agreement was signed in November 2025, and staff will continue to work with the organization to ensure compliance and appropriate recognition of SVCA's support.

12. Correspondence

It was noted that 56 items of correspondence were attached to the agenda. All but one related to the proposed conservation authority amalgamation and included letters from members of the public, the Honourable Lisa Thompson, neighbouring conservation authorities, and municipalities. The remaining item was correspondence from the Township of Chatsworth containing a motion in support of the 2026 SVCA budget, as noted by the General Manager/Secretary-Treasurer, and none of the correspondence items were pulled for discussion.

13. Closed Session

Motion #G26-17

Moved by Bill Stewart

Seconded by Bud Halpin

THAT the Authority move to Closed Session to discuss, in camera, to address matters relating to an identifiable individual(s) and THAT the GM/S-T, recording secretary, and Acting Manager of Corporate Services remain in the meeting.

Carried

The Board rose and reported at 4:37 p.m. that no motion was produced following closed session and that only matters relating to an identifiable individual were discussed.

14. Other Business

The General Manager/Secretary-Treasurer reported that Saugeen Conservation had issued a Flood Outlook statement from January 13th, 2026 to January 21st, 2026 for the Main Saugeen River and Tributaries in the Municipality of West Grey. It was noted that frazil ice had the potential to accumulate, driven by a prolonged forecast of cold temperatures and high stream flows caused by recent rainfall and snowmelt. It was indicated that a 24-hour monitoring schedule was circulated to staff, and that further steps would be implemented if required.

15. Adjournment

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 4:49 p.m. following a motion by Peter Whitten and seconded by Paul Allen.

Tom Hutchinson
Chair

Izabela Polowa
Recording Secretary