



Grand River Conservation Authority Minutes - General Membership Meeting

Date: November 24, 2023
Time: 9:30 am
Location: Hybrid Meeting of the General Membership
GRCA Administration Centre
Zoom Virtual Meeting

Members Present Bruce Banbury, Christine Billings, Gino Caputo, 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, Sandy Shantz, Rob Shirton, Jerry Smith, Shawn Watters, Chris White, Kari Williams, Alex Wilson, Pam Wolf

Regrets Natasha Salonen
Staff Samantha Lawson, Karen Armstrong, Beth Brown, Krista Bunn, Ron Gasparetto, Brandon Heyer, Janet Ivey, Katelyn Lynch, Sonja Radoja, Lisa Stocco, Vahid Taleban, Pam Walther-Mabee, Marijan Blazevic, Shari Dahmer, Eowyn Spencer

1. Call to Order

The Chair called the meeting to order at 9:31 a.m.

2. Certification of Quorum

The Secretary-Treasurer certified quorum with more than half of the Members present. A total of 25 Members attended the meeting.

3. Chair's Remarks

The Chair welcomed the Members and made the following remarks:

- On November 23, the GRCA held its annual employee appreciation event to honour all staff, as well as employees hitting milestone years of service. This year included Beth Brown, Jeff Pitcher, and Mary-Anne Cain reaching the 25 year mark with the GRCA. Congratulations to everyone and thank you to all of our employees for your dedication to this team.
- Municipal Budget presentations continue upon request by our participating municipalities. Most recently, Samantha and staff presented the 2024 draft budget to the City of Guelph and the Region of Waterloo.
- Samantha also attended the County of Brant and the Town of Erin Councils to discuss the category two MOUs.
- Reminder that the Audit Committee meets today in the Conference Room following adjournment of the General Membership. Audit members are Sue

Foxton, Guy Gardhouse, Brian Coleman, John Challinor, Shawn Watters, Pam Wolf, and Chris White.

- Conservation Ontario Council meets on December 11, and Samantha and the Chair will be in attendance.

G.Gardhouse joined the meeting at 9:33 a.m.

4. Review of Agenda

23-173

Moved By Pam Wolf

Seconded By John Challinor II

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

23-174

Moved By Susan Foxton

Seconded By Doug Craig

THAT the minutes of the General Membership Meeting of October 27, 2023 be approved as circulated.

Carried

7. Business Arising from Previous Minutes

There was no business arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.

8. Hearing of Delegations

There were no Delegations.

9. Presentations

There were no Presentations.

10. Correspondence

10.a County of Prince Edward - MECP Proposal

10.b Kevin Thomason - Nature Centres

23-175

Moved By Gord Greavette

Seconded By Shawn Watters

THAT Correspondence from the County of Prince Edward regarding support for the Province to stop the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks proposal to expand the use of the permit-by-rule to waste management systems, storm water management systems, and certain water taking activities, and from Kevin Thomason regarding the Nature Centres be received as information.

Carried

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

None.

12. Reports:

12.a Minutes of the Ad-hoc CA Act Review Committee - November 8, 2023

The Chair provided a brief reminder of the matter of the Outdoor Environmental Education Program report that was discussed at the October meeting, as identified in the Minutes of the previous meeting and the Minutes of the Ad-hoc Committee meeting held on November 8. It was noted that the motion of the previous meeting to defer the matter until January 2024 would put the GRCA out of legislative compliance with the new budgetary regulations. As such, a motion to rescind the deferral needs to be considered, and the matter discussed to determine appropriate next steps. The Chair added a reminder of changes to the CA Act which identifies outdoor environmental education as a category three program.

C.James and K.Chew joined the meeting at 9:36 a.m.

S.Lawson provided further detail regarding the proposed changes to the outdoor environmental education program and noted that the review and proposed changes were a result of the previous Board direction to transition the program to a self-sustaining funding model. Staff reviewed all of the facilities and some of them have significant capital needs. The proposed change to move the program to operate out of conservation areas does not mean closing the program. It is intended to provide operating efficiencies and reduce overall program costs. The proposed shift also offers improved program alignment, continuation of hands-on learning programs, and considers the needs of the school boards to reduce transportation costs and provide learning opportunities in additional formats. The program will continue to be an outdoor education program and having kids outside is preferred but virtual options are being requested by the school boards. Further evaluation would be completed before decisions would be made about the buildings in cases where the programs currently operate outside of the conservation areas (eg. App's Mills, Laurel Creek). The trails on the properties where nature centre facilities exist would still be open regardless. The program is not currently funded to cover the operating and capital costs of maintaining the buildings. Moving the program to operate out of existing infrastructure within the CAs would eliminate the additional expense of separate locations and support the goal of operating a self-funded program.

G.Caputo and M.Devine joined the meeting at 9:42 a.m.

K.Davis spoke to the matter, first noting Brantford's strong support of the GRCA and its programs, and then reading a letter provided to him from a member of the public, which highlighted concern about closing nature centres. K.Davis also expressed concern with the letter that was drafted and sent to Brantford and Brant to inquire about entering into a funding agreement for the outdoor education program, as many questions were left unanswered. K.Davis stated his opinion that staff should complete a more fulsome review of funding options to maintain the buildings where the program currently operates and that reserves could be used to fund the program while the review is completed.

Board members also expressed concerns and sought clarification on the matter, with the following key points of clarification and discussion:

- S.Foxton inquired if reserves can be used for this purpose, and noted there are other properties to consider which will remain available for public use. Additionally, she noted that continuing to operate out of these facilities is costly.
- P.Wolf noted that the Province has reconsidered some decisions recently, and suggested that the GRCA may want to write to the province and ask them to reconsider their actions.

- S.Shantz sought to clarify if the program can be offered on-site at schools and to inquire if the question in this matter is how much do we have to pay to maintain these additional properties.
- L.Stocco confirmed that outdoor education staff can and do travel to schools to offer programming in some cases. During the pandemic, the program shifted to a virtual basis but continued to work with school boards to offer various program options to accommodate changing needs. The program will continue to offer hands-on and virtual programs at GRCA locations as well as schools to keep the program as accessible as possible for the various user groups.
- L.Stocco advised that the existing properties outside of conservation areas where the program is offered are remote and exclusive-use properties that require a lot of resources to maintain. Also, the properties are being accessed more often by members of the public for recreational purposes, putting a further strain on resources and increasing risks to staff. Staff appreciate people's connection to the locations but have been focused on the sustainability of the program.
- K.Armstrong added that shifting the program to operate out of the conservation areas provides program alignment and operational efficiencies, and better facilitates program growth into future years.
- D.Miller expressed kudos to staff for looking at ways to keep the program going, and shared concern about the use of the nature centre properties should the program move. The concern being that App's Mills will end up closing if the education program is moved out of it, and that GRCA's reputation as a leader in outdoor education may be at risk. D.Miller noted agreement with the suggestion to allow a longer review period and time to consider other funding opportunities from other groups and donors.
- C.James inquired about cost breakdowns for other nature centre locations, Laurel Creek Nature Centre in particular. S.Radoja noted the whole program is at approximately a 300k deficit, and said she can prepare more information about the breakdown.
- R.Shirton noted that the infrastructure is a separate issue, the priority of the GRCA is not the buildings but continuing the education program, and suggested that the decision needs to be made as delaying does not solve the problem.
- G.Caputo added support for allowing more time to review the matter with other groups and partner municipalities.
- B.Coleman stated that elected officials at municipalities were not aware in time and suggested that the funding should come from reserves to allow time for further discussion.
- S.Watters inquired about resources to operate and maintain the programs within the nature centre buildings even if funding for the infrastructure was provided, and L.Stocco confirmed that it would be another aspect requiring further consideration, as there currently are not sufficient resources.
- K.Davis indicated that the \$300,000 deficit has historically been part of the levy to all municipalities and if all participating municipalities would agree to continue to fund it then each individual municipality's share would be less.
- C.White reminded everyone that in the 2024 draft budget, the transition reserve is being used to fund the deficit so it is already funded. Staff's proposal was for a 3 to 5 year transition timeline.

There was some further discussion to summarize the conversation and to determine the appropriate process for procedural consideration of the matter.

23-176

Moved By Guy Gardhouse

Seconded By Susan Foxton

THAT Motion 23-162 which reads as follows:

“THAT the motion 23-161 be deferred until the January 2024 meeting of the General Membership to allow discussion with participating municipalities about funding the program and nature centre facilities...”

be rescinded.

Carried by two-thirds majority.

The original motion from staff report GM-11-23-76 is on the floor.

23-177

Moved By Kevin Davis

Seconded By John Challinor II

THAT Report GM-11-23-76 be received and referred to staff up to or until September 2024.

Carried

23-178

Moved By John Challinor II

Seconded By Jerry Smith

THAT the minutes of the Ad-hoc Conservation Authorities Act Regulations Committee Meeting of November 8, 2023 be received as information.

Carried

12.b GM-11-23-84 - Cash and Investment Status

There were no comments or questions regarding this item.

23-179

Moved By Brian Coleman

Seconded By Gord Greavette

THAT Report Number GM-11-23-84 Cash and Investment Status – October 2023 be received as information.

Carried

12.c GM-11-23-86 - Reserves 2023

- D.Miller inquired about a policy for borrowing from reserves and if interest is charged, and S.Radoja noted that each situation is looked at to determine whether or not to charge interest.

23-180

Moved By John Challinor II

Seconded By Daniel Lawrence

THAT the *Property and Liability Insurance* Reserve be maintained at an amount equal to opening balance, less significant uninsured losses, and no interest to be allocated to this reserve for 2023;

AND THAT the *Building and Mechanical Equipment* Reserve be maintained at an amount equal to opening balance, plus amount transferred from the small office equipment reserve, less expenses or any unspent budgeted building maintenance and equipment amounts be transferred to this reserve for future expenditures, and no interest to be allocated to this reserve for 2023;

AND THAT the *Personnel* Reserve be maintained at an amount equal to opening balance, less expenditures or accruals for sick leave, vacation, staff restructuring and/or termination of employees, less CEWS claims interest charges, and no interest be allocated to this reserve for 2023;

AND THAT the *Transition* Reserve be maintained at an amount equal to opening balance, less forecast transfers from reserve, plus interest;

AND THAT the *Nature Centre* Reserves be maintained at amounts equal to opening balance, less expenses related to major maintenance of the Nature Centre buildings, plus interest;

AND THAT the *Information Systems and Technology* Reserve be maintained at a level where interest income and charge-out rates equal total operating and capital costs over the long run;

AND THAT the *Cottage Lot Program* Reserve be maintained at an amount equal to the opening balance, plus unspent 2023 budgeted cottage lot expenses related to service fee expenses, plus interest;

AND THAT the *Grand River Water Management Plan* Reserve be maintained at an amount equal to opening balance, less expenses related to updating the water management plan as budgeted (or forecast), plus interest;

AND THAT the *Planning Enforcement* Reserve be maintained at an amount equal to opening balance, plus any savings related to budgeted and unspent legal fees, less any expenses in excess of budget related to enforcement of planning regulations, plus interest;

AND THAT the *Property Rental* Reserve be maintained at an amount equal to opening balance, less unbudgeted maintenance expenses related to rental properties, plus any unspent budgeted property repairs and maintenance expenses including demolition costs, plus interest;

AND THAT the *Watershed Restoration* Reserve be maintained at an amount equal to opening balance, plus special project funding surpluses, less expenditures for wetland acquisitions or enhancements in the watershed, less expenditures for natural heritage restoration projects and conservation services watershed restoration projects as outlined in the budget (or forecast), plus interest;

AND THAT the *Forestry Management* Reserve be maintained at an amount equal to opening balance plus transfers to reserve of timber revenues, less expenses related to forest management expenses as budgeted (or forecast), plus interest;

AND THAT the *Master Plans* Reserve be maintained at amount equal to opening balance, less expenditures for Master Plans as budgeted (or forecast), plus interest;

AND THAT the *Water Management Operating* Reserve be maintained at amount equal to opening balance, less expenditures for engineering staffing, plus interest;

AND THAT the *Cambridge Desiltation Pond* Reserve be maintained at an amount that reflects the funds advanced to the Authority by the City of Cambridge, less actual cost to maintain the pond, plus interest;

AND THAT the *Completion of Capital Projects* Reserve be maintained at an amount that reflects obligations under outstanding capital contracts, less payments;

AND THAT the *Gravel* Reserve be maintained at an amount that includes all gravel income to date, less eligible expenditures, consistent with the original or subsequent agreements with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, plus interest;

AND THAT the *Land Sale* Reserves be maintained at amounts that include the proceeds of land sales, less costs (including interest charges) incurred to prepare lands for sale, less net expenditures and/or borrowing authorized by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) and as per policy statement dated June 13, 1997 (including floodplain mapping expenses), plus interest;

AND THAT the *General Capital* Reserve be maintained at an amount which reflects the surplus transferred in from the former Dunnville Lock reserve, less expenditures for any Water Management Capital projects approved by the General Membership, less unbudgeted expenditures related hydro turbine repairs plus any repayment of the loan related to the Conestogo turbine repairs, plus interest;

AND THAT the *Conservation Areas Capital/Stabilization* Reserve, increased/decreased by any surplus/deficit generated by the Conservation Areas in 2023, plus interest;

AND THAT the *Gauge* Reserve be maintained at an amount equal to opening balance less expenses related to gauge equipment as identified in the budget (or forecast) as applicable, plus interest;

AND THAT the *Water Control Structures* Reserve be maintained at an amount equal to the opening balance, less any funding required for spending in excess of budget, plus any unspent major maintenance budget amount, plus any unspent operating budget amount that was to be funded from general levy, plus interest;

AND THAT the *Motor Pool Equipment Replacement* Reserve be maintained at a target level of approximately 25% to 30% of replacement cost of the Motor Pool fleet, plus interest;

AND THAT the *Motor Pool Insurance* Reserve be maintained at an amount equal to the opening balance, plus interest, less significant uninsured losses.

Carried

12.d GM-11-23-86 - Financial Summary

There were no comments or questions regarding this item.

23-181

Moved By Doug Craig

Seconded By Lisa Hern

THAT the Financial Summary for the period ending October 31, 2023 be approved.

Carried

12.e GM-11-23-88 - Human Resources Policies Update

There were no comments or questions regarding this item.

23-182

Moved By Pam Wolf

Seconded By Bruce Banbury

THAT the Human Resources Policies dated November 24, 2023 be approved and implemented.

Carried

12.f GM-11-23-85 - Rockwood Bridge No.5 Replacement

There were no comments or questions regarding this item.

23-183

Moved By Brian Coleman

Seconded By Mike Devine

THAT the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) award the tender for the Rockwood Bridge No. 5 Replacement to 560789 Ontario Inc. O/A R&M Construction for the amount of \$238,022.50 excluding HST;

AND THAT a total budget of \$270,000.00 excluding HST be approved.

Carried

12.g GM-11-23-87 - Shand Dam Isolation Stoplogs Procurement - Tender Award

There were no comments or questions regarding this item.

23-184

Moved By Mike Devine

Seconded By Bruce Banbury

THAT the Grand River Conservation Authority award the contract for the Shand Dam Isolation Stoplog Procurement to Embertech Industrial Inc. for the amount of \$476,000 (excluding HST);

AND THAT an overall project budget of \$523,600 (excluding HST) be approved for this project.

Carried

12.h GM-11-23-89 - Current Watershed Conditions

- D.Miller thanked staff for the report and inquired about El Nino, and if it is anticipated to be dryer or wetter along with warmer. V.Taleban responded, noting that El Nino applies more in the Atlantic Ocean and that the long-term forecast is showing relatively normal precipitation with the warmer temperatures.

23-185

Moved By Pam Wolf

Seconded By Jerry Smith

THAT Report Number GM-11-23-89 – Current Watershed Conditions as of November 15, 2023 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

None.

16. Other Business

None.

17. Closed Meeting

23-186

Moved By Brian Coleman

Seconded By Rob Shirton

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

Carried

The General Membership convened in closed session and the live meeting stream was paused.

23-188

Moved By Guy Gardhouse

Seconded By John Challinor II

THAT the General Membership reconvene in open session.

Carried

The General Membership reconvened in open session and the live meeting stream was resumed.

17.a Minutes of the previous closed session

23-189

Moved By John Challinor II

Seconded By Susan Foxtan

THAT the minutes of the minutes of the previous closed session be approved as circulated.

Carried

17.b Labour Relations or Employee Negotiations

23-190

Moved By Pam Wolf

Seconded By Gord Greavette

THAT the salary ranges for non-union positions be increased by 2.25% effective January 1, 2024.

Carried

17.c Litigation or potential litigation

Motion 23-187 passed in closed session in accordance with *the Municipal Act* Section 239.6.

18. Next Meetings

General Membership and Chair's Reception - December 15, 2023 at 9:30 a.m.

19. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 10:45 a.m.

23-190

Moved By Guy Gardhouse

Seconded By Brian Colman

THAT the meeting of the General Membership be adjourned.

Carried

Chair

Secretary-Treasurer