AUSABLE BAYFIELD CONSERVATION
CREATING AWARENESS | TAKING ACTION

MINUTES

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Thursday, February 19, 2026
Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority Boardroom
Morrison Dam Conservation Area

DIRECTORS PRESENT
Ray Chartrand, Adrian Cornelissen, Joey Groot, Jaden Hodgins, Dave Jewitt, Dave Marsh, Wayne Shipley, Marissa Vaughan

DIRECTORS ABSENT
Steve Herold

STAFF PRESENT
Michael Bax, Andrew Bicknell, Tina Crown, Derek Dolmage, Millie Ghorbankhani, Abbie Gutteridge, Davin Heinbuck, Brian Horner, Jaden Schoelier, Nathan Schoelier, Mari Veliz.

CALL TO ORDER
Chair Ray Chartrand called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m., welcomed everyone in attendance, and read the Land Acknowledgement Statement.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

MOTION #BD 01/26 **Moved Joey Groot**
Seconded by Jaden Hodgins

"RESOLVED, THAT the agenda for the February 19, 2026, Board of Directors Meeting be approved as amended."

Carried.

DISCLOSURE OF PECUNIARY INTEREST
There were no disclosures of pecuniary interest at this meeting or from the previous meeting.

DISCLOSURE OF INTENTION TO RECORD
None.

ADOPTION OF MINUTES

MOTION #BD 02/26 **Moved by Dave Jewitt**
Seconded by Marissa Vaughan

"RESOLVED, THAT the minutes of the Board of Directors meeting held on December 18, 2025, and the motions therein be approved as circulated."

Carried.

BUSINESS OUT OF THE MINUTES

1. Regional Consolidation of Conservation Authorities – Responses and Communication

Davin Heinbuck, General Manager/Secretary-Treasurer, presented the Board of Directors with an update regarding Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority's (ABCA) actions taken since learning of the proposed consolidation of conservation authorities in October 2025. In addition, he also provided a list of local responses and submissions to the ERO #025-1257, including a list of those from our Member Municipalities, as well as other local organizations. In general, local municipalities and organizations have shown strong support for the current conservation authority model in Ontario. Davin also referenced the letter from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and Conservation Ontario to the Province, noting their recommendations to the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) that can be used as a reference for ongoing and future engagement.

ELECTIONS

Chair Ray Chartrand asked for a motion to appoint a chairperson for the elections.

MOTION 03/26 **Moved by Ray Chartrand**
Seconded by Marissa Vaughan

"RESOLVED, THAT Davin Heinbuck be appointed as chairperson for the election proceedings."

Carried.

Davin Heinbuck outlined the procedures prior to conducting the elections.

Appointment of Scrutineers

MOTION #BD 04/26 **Moved by Ray Chartrand**
Seconded by Wayne Shipley

"RESOLVED, THAT Nathan Schoelier and Abbie Gutteridge be appointed as scrutineers."

Carried.

The positions of Chair and Vice Chair were declared vacant.

Election of Chair

Nominations were called for the position of Chair for 2026. Adrian Cornelissen nominated Ray Chartrand.

Davin Heinbuck called for nominations two more times.

MOTION #BD 05/26 **Moved by Dave Jewitt**
Seconded by Joey Groot

"RESOLVED, THAT nominations for the position of Chair of the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority be closed."

Carried.

Ray Chartrand accepted his nomination with thanks, and Davin Heinbuck declared Mr. Chartrand, the representative for the Municipality of Huron East, as the Chair of the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority for 2026.

Election of Vice Chair

Nominations were called for the position of Vice Chair for 2026. Marissa Vaughan nominated Adrian Cornelissen.

Mr. Heinbuck called for nominations a second time. Adrian Cornelissen nominated David Marsh. Ray Chartrand nominated Jaden Hodgins.

Mr. Heinbuck called for nominations a third and final time.

MOTION #BD 06/26 **Moved by Joey Groot**
Seconded by Jaden Hodgins

"RESOLVED, THAT nominations for the position of Vice Chair of the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority be closed."

Carried.

Mr. Heinbuck asked the nominees to speak to their nominations. Adrian Cornelissen declined his nomination as he does not plan to run for council in the fall, and thanked the Board for their support over the past year. Jaden Hodgins also declined his nomination for similar reasons. Dave Marsh accepted his nomination, and thanked the directors for their confidence.

Mr. Heinbuck declared Mr. Marsh, representative for the Municipality of Lambton Shores and the Township of Warwick, as Vice Chair for the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority for 2026.

Ray Chartrand again thanked the directors for their support and assumed the Chair.

APPOINTMENTS

Davin Heinbuck reminded the directors that the auditor, financial institution and investment firm were appointed for a five-year period, and will not need to be reappointed this year. However, the solicitors used by the Authority need to be appointed. Davin recommended appointing the same four solicitors that were appointed in 2025.

MOTION #BD 07/26 **Moved by Marissa Vaughan**
Seconded by Jaden Hodgins

"RESOLVED, THAT the firms of Little, Masson & Reid, Exeter; Raymond & McLean, Exeter; Grant Inglis of Scott Petrie, LLP of London; and Fraser M. Kelly, London be appointed as the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority solicitors for 2026."

Carried.

PROGRAM REPORTS

1. (a) Development Review

Jaden Schoelier, Water & Planning Technician, presented the Development Review report pursuant to Ontario Regulation 41/24 *Prohibited Activities, Exemptions and Permits*. Through the application process, proposed developments within regulated areas are protected from flooding and erosion hazards. Staff granted permission for 7 *Applications for Permission* and 12 *Minor Works Applications.*

(b) Violation/Appeals Update

Andrew Bicknell, Water and Planning Manager, provided a brief update on two ongoing violations. He noted that staff are still awaiting the decision by the Ontario Land Tribunal regarding a permit for a deck/storage structure in Lambton Shores, for which the ABCA did not grant permission.

In addition, he noted that staff were contacted by the landowner where a violation occurred in 2025 in Port Franks along the Ausable River. Staff have met with the landowner several times and are hopeful that voluntary restoration can be expected. This particular violation also included works done on ABCA property, so accountability will be important when it comes to the restoration work.

MOTION #BD 08/26 **Moved by Jaden Hodgins**
Seconded by Wayne Shipley

"RESOLVED, THAT the Board of Directors affirm the approval of applications as presented in Program Report # 1 – a) Development Review and receive the verbal Violations and Appeals update as presented."

Carried.

2. 2025 Permit Review Timelines

Andrew Bicknell presented an annual report, which summarizes the ABCA's Ontario Regulation 41/24 – Prohibited Activities, Exemptions and Permits. This report is a requirement of the *Conservation Authorities Act*. The report confirms that staff of the ABCA continue to excel at bettering expected permit review timelines, noting that 97% of the permits were issued well before the time limit. It was observed that the preconsultation process is often key to reasonable turnaround times for permitting.

MOTION #BD 09/26 **Moved by David Marsh**
Seconded by Dave Jewitt

"RESOLVED, THAT the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority Board of Directors receives the report 2025 Permit Review Timelines for information as presented."

Carried.

3. ABCA Revised Fee Schedule – Planning and Permitting Fees

Andrew Bicknell reminded the Board of Directors that, beginning January 1, 2023, conservation authorities received correspondence from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry advising that the fees for planning and permitting related activities could not be raised for the period of one year. Subsequent directions extended this fee freeze through to the end of December 2025. During the 2026 budget preparation, it was expected that this freeze would continue into 2026. However, to date, no correspondence has been received regarding the Planning and Regulations fees for 2026. As such, the majority of conservation authorities have or plan to update their Fee Schedule with an increase in these fees following a user-pay model. Staff have suggested revisions to the Fee Schedule that amount to an average increase of approximately 4%, which is still below the COLA over the three years since the last increase. Staff noted that these increases are in keeping with many of the surrounding conservation authorities.

MOTION #BD 10/26 **Moved by Wayne Shipley**
Seconded by Jaden Hodgins

"RESOLVED, THAT the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority Board of Directors approves the revised 2026 Fee Schedule, which includes updates to the ABCA Planning and Permitting fees, and

"FURTHER, THAT the revised 2026 Fee Schedule changes be implemented immediately, and

"FURTHER, THAT the revised 2026 Fee Schedule be posted on the ABCA website, as approved."

Carried.

4. Unaudited Profit and Loss Statements

Tina Crown, Financial Services Coordinator, presented the unaudited statements of profit and loss from January 2025 through December 2025. The audited financial statements are expected to be ready in March.

MOTION #11/26 **Moved by Dave Marsh**
Seconded by Marissa Vaughan

"RESOLVED, THAT the unaudited profit and loss financial statement for 2025 be received as presented."

Carried.

5. Rock Glen Conservation Area (RGCA) 2025 Summary

Michael Bax, RGCA Superintendent, presented an overview of the 2025 season at RGCA. In addition to Michael, there are two other staff who help at RGCA, one from May through October, and a second student for July and August. RGCA once again saw high attendance numbers in 2025, with a total of just under 45,000 visitors during the period in which it is staffed. There are more visitors during the off-season, but the numbers are not as easy to track.

In 2024, e-transfers were added as a way to pay for entry into RGCA, and in 2025 this method was used 484 times. Staff also continued to sell both individual and family passes in 2025. While these numbers were not as high as 2024, it should be noted that there were more pavilion rentals in 2025 as compared to the previous year.

In addition to gate attendance, staff can also track visitors to the Arkona Lions Museum and Information Centre via the Museum guestbook. In 2025, there were 2,563 entries from 52 countries, as well as 11 provinces/territories and 21 US States represented. RGCA and the Museum continue to provide an excellent venue for educational programming. In 2025, along with ABCA education staff, RCGA hosted just under 30 programs.

In 2026, RGCA will continue to provide a valuable experience to conservation area visitors. Staff will seek to increase the number of passes sold in 2026, as well as continue to enhance off-season and "shoulder season" opportunities. Staff will also continue to work with the Arkona Lions Club and Lambton County to improve the Museum and Visitor's Centre.

MOTION #BD 12/26 **Moved by Wayne Shipley**
Seconded by Jaden Hodgins

"RESOLVED, THAT the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority Board of Directors receives the report 2025 RGCA 2025 Summary for information as presented."

Carried.

6. Rock Glen Conservation Area Master Plan (2026 – 2036)

Nathan Schoelier, Stewardship, Conservation Lands and Education Manager, provided the Board of Directors with an updated draft of the Rock Glen Conservation Area Master Plan. He reminded Directors that staff used past master plans, institutional knowledge, as well as public feedback to finalize this draft. Upon approval, it will be posted on the ABCA website.

MOTION #BD 13/26 **Moved by Jaden Hodgins**
Seconded by Joey Groot

"RESOLVED, THAT the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority Board of Directors approves the Rock Glen Conservation Area Master Plan (2026 – 2036)."

Carried.

7. Draft Ausable River Cut Conservation Area Master Plan Update

Nathan Schoelier provided a draft Master Plan for the Ausable River Cut Conservation Area (ARCA), which was last updated in 2004. He reminded Directors that this update was included in the 2026 budget. He noted, that as with other master plan updates, staff plan to reintroduce institutional knowledge to the ARCA Master Plan, which will allow decisions to be made that consider historic information, alongside new tools and resources. The next step with the ARCA Master Plan update is to make the plan available for public and stakeholder feedback. Staff have identified several organizations and groups to have meaningful engagement, and will utilize various methods to receive feedback. Once engagement has been completed, staff will bring back a final draft of the plan for Board approval.

MOTION #14/26 **Moved by Dave Jewitt**
Seconded by Wayne Shipley

"RESOLVED, THAT the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority Board of Directors approves the draft Master Plan update for the Ausable River Cut Conservation Area to be made available for public and stakeholder feedback."

Carried.

8. Vehicle Tender

Nathan Schoelier presented the Board of Directors with the results of a vehicle tender. The new vehicle will replace the 2017 Chevrolet Colorado, which supports the programs and services of all departments of the ABCA. The purchase will be funded through the motor pool. The closing date for the tender was Monday, February 16, 2026. Davin Heinbuck, Nathan Schoelier and Derek Dolmage met the following day to open and review the tender. There were two submissions, and both included a trade-in value for the 2017 Chevrolet Colorado. The 2026 budget included $70,000 in revenue to support the acquisition of this vehicle, with the remaining funds used to replace other equipment needed for fieldwork. The bid received from Huron Motor Products (HMP) for the purchase of a 2026 Chevrolet Silverado 1500 4WD Crew Cab is the lowest priced bid. It meets the requirements outlined in the tender and is within the 2026 budget at a purchase price of $47,333 plus HST. Should the ABCA accept the offer from HMP to purchase the 2017 Chevrolet Colorado, the purchase price of the new truck, including non-refundable taxes, would be $35,954.86.

MOTION #BD 15/26 **Moved by Joey Groot**
Seconded by Dave Jewitt

"RESOLVED, THAT the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority Board of Directors authorizes staff to divest the 2017 Chevrolet Colorado to Huron Motor Products for $12,000 with an acceptable variance of up to 10% less than the stated price."

Carried.

9. Huronview Innovative Drainage Demonstration

Mari Veliz, Healthy Watersheds Manager, reminded the Board of Directors of the Huronview Demonstration site, which was established in 2019 with various trials for subsurface drainage, surface drainage, as well as tile spacing comparisons. In 2025, the ABCA secured funding to support a further sub-irrigation innovation at this site. The design committee comprised of drainage contractors, staff from B.M. Ross and Associates Ltd., the Huron County Soil and Crop Improvement Association, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAFA), and the University of Guelph, is finalizing the design for this project. As this is a highly innovative project, requiring a special solar pump. While multiple quotations were received, this is a highly specialized piece of equipment. Therefore, the design committee would like to procure the best pump based on the need of the project.

MOTION #BD 16/26 **Moved by Marissa Vaughan**
Seconded by David Marsh

"RESOLVED, THAT the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority Board of Directors authorize staff to work with the Huronview Design Committee to ensure that the best value solar pump be procured for the Huronview sub-irrigation project."

Carried.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

MOTION #BD 17/26 **Moved by Joey Groot**
Seconded by Jaden Hodgins

"RESOLVED, THAT the minutes of the Striking Committee meeting held on January 15, 2026 and the motions therein be approved as circulated."

Carried.

Along with the Striking Committee Report, Abbie Gutteridge, Corporate Services Coordinator, noted that in reviewing the Terms of Reference for each of the committees in 2025, it was noted that there were no formal Terms of Reference for the Striking Committee, as it began as an ad hoc committee until the 1980s, when it began meeting annually. As such, staff drafted Terms of Reference for the Striking Committee to inform the committee going forward.

MOTION #BD 18/26 **Moved by Adrian Cornelissen**
Seconded by Wayne Shipley

"RESOLVED, THAT the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority Board of Directors approves the Striking Committee Terms of Reference as presented."

Carried.

CORRESPONDENCE

1) Davin Heinbuck noted that the only correspondence received were further letters to the Province or ERO responses from municipalities, organizations and conservation authorities.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

MOTION #BD 19/26 **Moved by Joey Groot**
Seconded by Wayne Shipley

"RESOLVED, THAT the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority Board of Directors go into Committee of the Whole at 11:49 a.m. to discuss property matters, with Davin Heinbuck, Abbie Gutteridge, and Nathan Schoelier remaining in attendance."

Carried.

MOTION #BD 20/26 **Moved by Joey Groot**

Seconded by Dave Jewitt

"RESOLVED, THAT the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority Board of Directors rise and report at 12:09 p.m."

Carried.

MOTION #BD 21/26 **Moved by Dave Jewitt**
Seconded by Jaden Hodgins

"RESOLVED, THAT the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority Board of Directors authorize staff to proceed with the grant application, as discussed."

Carried.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Rock Glen Conservation Area – Repairs
   Nathan Schoelier prepared a brief report regarding some needed repairs at Rock Glen Conservation Area (RGCA). The recommendations regarding this issue were not known prior to preparing the Board of Directors Agenda Package, and therefore, it is being presented under New Business. While completing snow course measurements at RGCA on January 8, 2026, ABCA staff noticed some erosion on the downstream side of the watercourse crossing near the entrance of RGCA. Staff engaged a local engineering firm, B.M. Ross and Associates Ltd., who visited the site with staff on January 29. It was recommended by Ryan Munn, Senior Engineer for B.M. Ross, that ABCA hire an experienced contractor to fill the eroded void and install a vertical concrete wall to help prevent further undercutting. He advised that VanDenBerk Construction would be available to do the required work in the spring to help alleviate any disruptions to RGCA's peak season. Mr. Munn provided an estimate of $13,000, plus tax, for the project, which includes site drawings prepared by B.M. Ross, as well as the cost of the repairs by the contractor. This damage occurred after the preparation of the 2026 Budget, and therefore, no funds were budgeted for this work. However, staff have identified the repairs as both critical and time sensitive, and suggest that the project be funded through gate entry revenue from 2026. Any shortfall can be offset by reserves at year-end, if needed.

MOTION #BD 22/26 **Moved by David Marsh**
Seconded by Wayne Shipley

"RESOLVED, THAT the Ausable Bayfield Board of Directors authorizes staff to retain the services of B.M. Ross & Associates Ltd. To facilitate the repair of the watercourse crossing at Rock Glen Conservation Area, and

"FURTHER, THAT the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority Board of Directors approve a project budget of $14,300, plus HST, inclusive of a 10% contingency, and

"FURTHER, THAT the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority Board of Directors approves the use of reserves to offset any losses incurred at year-end, as a result of this project."

Carried.

2. Davin Heinbuck reminded that Board of Directors that staff intend to reach out to Matthew Rae, MPP for Perth-Wellington, to speak with him regarding the proposed consolidation of conservation authorities. In consultation with staff from Maitland Valley Conservation Authority and Upper Thames River Conservation Authority, it was suggested that an invitation from West Perth, North Perth and the City of Stratford may be well received. Staff are now waiting to hear regarding a meeting.

3. Davin Heinbuck reported that he attended ROMA in January and was at the Minister's Forum, often referred to as the "Bear Pit". This year there were two forums held on subsequent days. He noted that this time the topics were set, and that once a topic had been broached it could not be raised again. The first question was redirected to the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, who brought up consolidation, meaning there were no further questions regarding conservation authorities.

4. Davin Heinbuck reminded Directors about the Flood Emergency Workshop, being held at the Exeter Legion on February 26, 2026.

5. Joey Groot asked staff if any decisions need to be made, specifically regarding ABCA assets, in light of the proposed consolidation. It was noted that there have been conversations among conservation authorities regarding this topic, but until more is known, ABCA will continue to operate as usual. It is expected that some decisions may be announced by the Province in the next few weeks.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned by Jaden Hodgins at 12:26 p.m.

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Ray Chartrand	Abigail Gutteridge
Chair	Secretary

Copies of program reports are available upon request.
Contact Abigail Gutteridge, Corporate Services Coordinator