

Hidden Lake Association annual meeting of May 18, 2025.

The meeting was called to order at 1:04 PM by Vice President Brian Polak.

BOG members in attendance: Jay Cassella, Brian Polak, Bob Kiehm, Frank Nunes, Cynthia Porriello, and Heather Edelson by Zoom.

Members in attendance: James & Victoria Nicholson, BJ Choitner, Celest Benoit, Barbara Delicata, Kathy Minkler, Cyndi McKinnon, Mary Shea, Karin Bullock, Kerri Wilson, Sandra Soby, Sandra Kiehm, Wolfgang Stebbins, Marybeth Russo, Renee Norkin, Betty Barsevich, Lawrence Poulin, Jill Carey, Jean Cassella, David Chalifoux, Anthony Grandazo, Patricia Fraser Shukis,

Members on Zoom: Mary Dortche (Arnold) NOT VOTING, Andrea Hayes

Non members: Sheryl Esposito

Association president Jay Cassella announced that he would not be presiding over this annual meeting and that vice president Brian Polak would be running it instead.

It was noted that we are missing the president's address from the 2024 yearly meeting in our online minutes, and those should be added.

A motion to waive the reading of the minutes of the 2024 annual meeting was made by Bob Kiehm and seconded by Frank Nunes, the motion passed unanimously.

The floor was open to general discussion, Wolfgang Stebbins, new member on 404 Hidden Lake Rd, Ask about the septic pumping schedule and was advised that all the septic tanks are pumped out every four years on a rotating basis, he also asked about access to the HLA beaches and was advised that all members are welcome and are allowed to store their kayaks at the beaches and that he should request a registration sticker for it from Cynthia Porriello. The BOG welcomed him to the Association.

The tax collector's report was read by Jay Cassella as prepared by Sheri Berger who was not in attendance today. A copy is to be submitted to the record, but has not yet been received. A motion was made by Wolfgang Stebbins and was seconded by Mary Shea to approve the tax collector's report, The motion passed unanimously.

The treasurer's report was read by Bob Kiehm, he brought to the members attention some over budget line items, and the need for a vote at today's meeting by Association members to transfer funds in order to close the books. A copy of the treasurer's report was submitted for the record. A motion was made by Anthony Grandazzo and seconded by Victoria Nicholson to reallocate the necessary funds to cover the over budget line items, the motion passed unanimously.

The annual lake report was submitted for the record and was read out loud by Frank Nunes.

Road report: there was none

Audit committee report, vice president Brian Polak indicated that this would be tabled for a later discussion.

Bylaw committee report by vice president Brian Polak, who indicated that today the membership would be voting on three bylaw amendment proposals, Section 16, Section 22 and Section 24.

Entertainment and fundraising report, there was no report as per Sandy Kiehm.

Town and state legal report is not applicable as we do not have such.

Aquatic wildlife committee report was read out loud by Keha Esposito and a copy was submitted for the record. Keha Emphasized the need for us to engage further with the community as much as possible and to continue moving forward our existing projects. Marybeth Russo will be leaving the committee; new members are needed and welcome.

Web and Facebook report presented by Sandra Sobey, she explained their upcoming goals. Jay Cassella indicated that the website got disrupted, but he is in the process of reinstalling and updating all the information.

Brian Polak and Bob Kiehm spoke about unchecked development around the lake as it pertains to a large housing tract going in and concerns over runoff from there, and it's impact on the lake. They are awaiting on the contractor to request permits from the Town to get details on the project, thus far only logging permits have been pulled. The board of governors will make sure to stay informed and check that the necessary safety measures are followed and will keep the membership informed. Victoria Nicholson had some questions about how this development might possibly impact the associations "paper roads", she was advised that is unknown at this time.

Septic committee report was presented by Anthony Grandazzo, he indicated that the association pumps each septic every four years, this is paid through the association's tax collection fees. Six bids were requested and only our current provider, Cahill responded. Cahill has indicated they will need an increase for this upcoming season to \$365 per septic. Pumping will start in July and run through the fall, notices will be going out to the impacted property owners. Brian Polak indicated that he is continuing to explore lower pumping costs through potential new bidding responses.

Karin Bullock noted that the 2023 and 2024 financial audits have not yet been completed.

The president's annual address was read out loud by Frank Nunes, a copy was submitted for the record. Anthony Grandazzo commented on the outgoing president, Jay Cassella's accomplishments and efforts and recognized his hard work.

Member Renee Norkin of 35 W. Shore Dr noted that flood waters have been causing damage to the road by her home and that it needs to be repaired, vice president Brian Polak indicated that we are working on it.

Budget report was presented by Bob Kiehm, he read the report and explained its various components as well as how funds are allocated and spent in addition to explaining the process for authorizing expenditures. He indicated that this year's funds for dam repair have been zeroed out, the lake and weed reserve fund and the miscellaneous fund were both also zeroed out. Property maintenance line item was reduced and some reserves were moved to the chip seal fund as chip sealing has not been done in seven years and needs to be redone. The BOG is estimating that the cost for chip sealing will be about \$65,000 as extrapolated from the prior cost +7 years of inflation. That price is not including necessary road repairs that must be done prior to chip sealing which are thought to be an additional \$5,000 more for a total of \$70,000. Such expenditure would leave very few funds remaining in reserve, and as such the board of governors will need to request an increase in the Mil rate of one Mil. This increase is projected to generate approximately \$7,500 per year to refill the chip seal budget for when it is next needed in five or six years, which is the timeframe that is recommended for this maintenance work. Mary Shea asked if it is possible to simply patch the potholes as a way to save money, she was advised that the road is actually sinking, and the proposed work must be done, cutting corners will not achieve the necessary goals and will actually lead to additional cost in the near future. Chip sealing does not remove any of the existing material. Karin Bullock asked about seeking available grant money and also advised the board of governors that the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) website of the state of Connecticut provides a service that allows municipalities to put out bids for various infrastructure work from their list of approved vendors, she suggested that the board of governors explore both of these options before requesting a tax rate increase from the members. Caroline Chalifoux said that she feels that it is not realistic or appropriate for the board of governors to restructure so many aspects all at once and that she wants to hear more about the various needs. Rene Norkin asked why not explore all options. Jean Cassella feels that we need to keep replenishing our reserves as well as maintaining an emergency fund. Marybeth Russo asked about the possibility of a smaller increase and Cynthia Porriello explain that what is on the table is a yes or no vote for the proposed one Mil rate increase. Keha Esposito asked about the history of chip sealing and indicated that it is her impression that it was previously done in phases, but the board of governors explained that even with doing it all at once it has become increasingly hard to find contractors who are willing to take on such a small project as it is not advantageous and cost-effective for them to transport and set up all the required heavy equipment for such a small area. Keha Esposito was told that the only exception there has been to the entire project being done at once was that once, one of the paper roads was done separately due to some contentious issues with members on said road. Treasurer Bob Kiehm indicated that at the proposed rate it will take 7 1/2 years to replenish this proposed expenditure of approximately \$70,000. Jean Cassella indicated that her employer is a paving company, she explained the economies of scale involved in this project and the difficulty with finding contractors given those facts. Larry Poulin Indicated that this project consists of two parts, the first is repairing the road and then once that is completed, the chip seal process. The question was raised if it

would be possible to consider finding one company that could do both parts of the project in order to create economies of scale and save some money. Victoria Nicholson noted that increases are never welcome, but that from prior experience, it would actually be worse to not increase the taxes and end up not having enough money in reserves. It is best to prepare and not need the funds than it is to need the funds and not have them. Mary Shea, who was on Zoom asked if it is possible to have any efforts made to seek contracts documented somewhere so that the community can attempt to help seek out other competing and possibly better options, Jay indicated that Empire Paving is the company that has been previously used and who we are considering at this time, but all proposals would be welcome. The vote was held to approve the proposed budget as presented. The vote was cast receiving 16 "YES" votes and 8 "NO" votes. There were no abstentions, the motion passed, the vote count was completed by Cynthia Porriello and Frank Nunes.

Three bylaw amendment proposals were presented by Brian Polak, he read each summary of the current language and proposed changes in the language for sections 16, 22 and 24, and gave his rationale for the changes.

Section 16 was open to comments, Keha Esposito noted that this is the third try that the board of governors has taken to get this section amended, she is frustrated that despite the membership repeatedly voting this proposal down it keeps being brought back up. She asked that the board of governors, please honor the member's past votes, and the voice of the membership. Celeste Benoit pondered why would members want to volunteer for any open committees or other positions when this proposal wants to give the power to the president to just knock anything down. She feels that members should continue to have more of a voice and that the goal should not be to concentrate power in the president. Karin Bullock noted that our association leadership is not a political body with competing parties, we, as association members are meant to point the board of governors in the direction that we want, and it is the job of the board of governors and the president to execute those mandates. Jay Cassella explained the rationale by exemplifying using member who he claims has been contentious, but yet he appointed her to the audit committee and named checked Karin Bullock. At this point, Karin Bullock asked for a Point Of Order and president Jay Cassella got up and started walking out, but returned. Pat Shukis agrees that President Cassella's example of not liking someone and naming them personally is not an inappropriate statement to make as that says nothing about the person only about his feelings. She agrees with Brian Polak's assessment that this is a worthy goal. Anthony Grandazzo spoke up in favor of this bylaw amendment. Frank Nunes spoke of the importance for each member to interpret the language as it is presented and then deciding if they support what they believe the language says to empower them or the president and vote depending if they are for or against such consolidation of power. The votes were cast, Cynthia Porriello, Sandra and Barbara Delicata counted and verified the votes. The vote count was 12 votes for the amendment and 12 votes against the amendment, the amendment requires a 2/3 majority to pass and thus it has FAILED.

Section 22 amendment was open for comments, Keha Esposito noted again that it is her opinion that the members are meant to empower the president to execute their direction and that the president should act as the members may direct him or her. She objects to the change in the language. Voting was conducted, and the counting of the votes was conducted by the same members as previously, the tally on this vote was 12 votes against and 11 votes in favor with one abstention. This bylaw amendment also FAILS to pass.

Amendment for section 24 was open to comments, Marybeth Russo Thanked the board of governors for making this proposal for change as she feels, the job of recording secretary is already very arduous, and there is no need to overburden the recording secretary as an ex-officio position. The amendment was put to vote, and the ballots were again counted and verified by the same team as the previous two. The final vote tally was 23 in favor and one against with no abstentions, this by law amendment PASSED muster and will be implemented.

The floor was open to nominations and Barbara Delicata spoke up to voice her concern regarding the fact that the required financial audits have not been completed for fiscal year 2023 or fiscal year 2024 as required. Brian Polak said that that matter had been tabled as the board does not know why 2024's audit failed to be completed by the deadline, efforts are underway to communicate with the audit committee chairperson who has been difficult to reach. The matter will be discussed at a later date.

The floor was open to nominations for president, Carolyn Chalifoux nominated Bob Kiehm, and he declined the nomination and then indicated that he would not be running for the treasurer position either. Victoria Nicholson indicated that she feels that those members who have previously been contentious towards the board of governors should now run for the open positions and do a better job so that the town of Haddam does not take over our association business. James Nicholson then as a follow up nominated Karin Bullock for the position of president and after some deliberation, she accepted the nomination. Mary Shea, then nominated Brian Polak for the position of president, but he also declined the nomination due to other commitments but indicated he is honored, she then followed up with a nomination of Cynthia Porriello for president but Cynthia also declined the nomination. Anthony Grandazzo then spoke up and made several aggressive and verbally demeaning comments about Karin Bullock's past challenging of the existing president and at that point Karin Bullock rescinded her acceptance of the presidency nomination. Carolyn Chalifoux then nominated Marybeth Russo for president and Marybeth accepted the nomination.

The floor was open to nominations for vice president, Carolyn Chalifoux nominated Brian Polak and he accepted the nomination.

The floor was open for nominations for recording secretary, Karin Bullock nominated Frank Nunes and Frank Nunes accepted the nomination.

The floor was open to nominations for treasurer and Bob Kiehm was nominated by Carolyn Chalifoux and he accepted the nomination.

The floor was open to nominations for Tax collector, Victoria Nicholson nominated Sheri Berger and Frank Nunes seconded the nomination. It was noted that although Sheri Berger was not present today she had previously advised the Board that she would accept the nomination if she were to be nominated again.

The floor was open to nominations for three (3) year board members, Keha Esposito nominated Karin Bullock and she accepted the nomination. Victoria Nicholson nominated Jill Cary but she was not present and according to her partner had previously indicated no interest in accepting. Sandra Sobey and Sandy Kiehm nominated Carolyn Chalifoux as three year board member and she accepted the nomination. A vote was held for the open three-year board member position. Counting and witnessing the vote tally was conducted by the same team as previous for votes. The results came in with 12 votes for Carolyn Chalifoux and 11 votes for Karin Bullock giving the win to Carolyn Chalifoux.

Because none of the other positions were contested, the incumbents only need one vote to win reappointment to the position. Recording secretary, Frank Nunes cast one vote for each of the remaining open positions of president, vice president, recording secretary, treasurer, and tax collector. Giving each of them the win.

The floor was opened up to general discussion. A member from the floor, asked whether it would be possible for the association to have some sort of community swap board, they were advised we would look into options for that. Barbara Delicata asked about the discussion on the audit committee having been tabled and what is known so far about it having been held up for the last two years. Bob Kiehm said that in 2023 he missed one of the monthly meetings where reallocation was needed for some funds and the that relocation later got passed, and then when it did, the books were given to the chairperson, but the audit never got done. This last year, 2024, the information and records were provided to all three members, but no audit was completed until just this week, the chairperson submitted the completed report, but the other two members of the audit committee refused to sign off on it because it was completed without their participation and approval. The current chair person, Alan Howell has been difficult to contact and no one really knows why he did not respond to many communications by the various members of the committee and board of governors. Ultimately his audit cannot be accepted as submitted. Bob Kiehm indicated that he sent the existing records to prior audit committee members for review, but this did not give them enough time to do much with it. Follow up will need to be made on the matter. Mary Shea was on Zoom and indicated that she spoke with Alan Howell about this matter and that he told her that he does not have the books and never receive them from tax collector Sheri Berger and treasurer Bob Kiehm. Bob Kiehm immediately contested that assertion and said that every original was given to him in person. According to Mary, Alan is quite upset and feels that there was serious miscommunication and meetings missed and/or not scheduled as necessary. There was also concern raised regarding the difference between “proposals for work” versus “signed contracts”. Celeste asked if a new chair person could be appointed and stated that it would behoove the board of governors to get that done ASAP as this is a serious failure and must be made a priority. Mary Shea noted that she needs to know that this will be done expeditiously and stated that it is her opinion that the members must be kept informed of progress on this. She also feels the members should have been told about these issues when it was not getting done on schedule. Celeste

explained the process for reconciling the books, Cynthia Porriello clarified some of the timelines given as per our bylaws. Karin Bullock indicated that the audit is due by the annual meeting and Alan Howell was supposed to propose a Special Meeting to have gotten this done but the meeting was never called. Bob Kiehm clarified some of the timelines discussed. Marybeth Russo asked to change the subject and put forth the question to all those present, If anyone wanted to volunteer, she asked if there were any volunteers anywhere and asked that anyone interested in volunteering in any capacity contact her. Bob Kiehm moved to adjourn the annual meeting, Brian Polak seconded the motion, the meeting was adjourned at 3:34 PM.