



Vermont Horse Council Annual Board of Directors and Members Meeting
January 17, 2026
10:00am Monkton Town Hall

Attending in Person: Jeannette Cole (P), Michelle Brewster (VP), Emma O'Neill (S), Mikayla Pick (T) Monica Raymond (BOD), Kerrie Garvey (BOD), Robin Severy (BOD), Linsey Williams (BOD), Lisa Lafont (BOD), Cody Vernet (M), Carmel Stone, Lois Griggs, Kim Highter (M), Sarah Isham (M), Leah Coombs (M) Carol Wood (M), Belinda Brown, Heidi Krantz (M)

Attending via Zoom: Laurie Baird (BOD), Diane Stockton-Breese, Mielle Fox (M), Ryne Kessler, Karen McKnight (M)

Agenda:

10:04am - Call to Order - Jeannette

10:07am - Secretary Report - Jeannette

- The 2025 annual meeting minutes were available in person and on VHC website prior to meeting, no formal request to read aloud, under the assumption that members had already reviewed.
- The annual meeting minutes from January 25, 2025, were unanimously approved without corrections.

10:09am - 2025 Financial Review - Jeannette

- 2025 Year in Review Presentation - see link below
- A consolidated profit and loss comparison sheet was available for in person review.
- 2025 Financial Summary:
 - Expenses remained relatively flat
 - Net income was substantially less due to:
 - Decrease in business memberships -\$2,450.00
 - Decrease in individual memberships - \$1,270.00
 - No equine summit held -\$2,264.00
 - Expense of Silver Lake Trail work -\$4195.54
 - Financial position at year end = \$25,260.46
- Income Highlights:
 - 2025 trail donations included several donations over \$1,000 in addition to the USDA grant reimbursement
 - General donations included BoD members covering VHC subscriptions such as Mailchimp, Zoom, etc.
 - Event income from the Spring Fling and NEK Expo was relatively low
 - Swag store sales and savings account interest was also very low in 2025

- Expense Highlights:
 - Organizational membership dues remained the same (AHC, VGC, etc.)
 - Director & Officer insurance coverage and expense remained similar, but Mikayla is working on resolving issues with liability insurance coverage due to sourcing issues
 - Stripe banking fees were lower in 2025 due to no equine summit being held
 - Nancy negotiated for a lower nonprofit rate for Quickbooks

10:17am - Goals and Scorecard - Jeannette

- Copies of the 2025 VHC goals were available for in person review.
- Accomplishments Highlights
 - Good Social Media response
 - Investment in 2024 website improvements is showing returns
 - Newsletters engagement rate is high
 - Facebook members-only and public pages are being viewed
 - Trail expansion and improvement projects in GMNF, Willoughby, and Victory
 - Exciting progress on Legislation Bill 243
 - Continued involvement with the Coalition of State Horse Councils and the American Horse Council
- Website Analytics
 - For specific website statistics and recommendations, see presentation link below.
 - Search engine traffic is the highest/best traffic source, but it's impossible to tell if users are converting
 - Direct website traffic appears to be underperforming
 - Jeannette will work with Paul to see if there is a way to determine how much/what traffic is coming directly from VHC board members
 - Trail resources may be a goldmine for converting members as this page has the best overall engagement
 - Try to determine which users are "day riders" versus "trip riders"
 - Geographic concentration shows an opportunity for expansion
 - Many non-VT users are looking at our trail pages and information
 - Social media has untapped potential
 - The events page drives strong interest but needs more visibility

10:31am - 2025 Trails Committee Accomplishments - Monica + Laurie

- Willoughby State Forest
 - Received final approval for equestrian use of an expanded trail network - multiple trails now open to equestrian use, no longer just gravel roads
 - Some gravel roads are suitable for carriage driving and can connect to local neighborhood roads
 - There is one large parking lot that requires a quarter-mile road ride on a busier road (does have shoulder), and three designated pull-off areas widened for trailers
 - Updated map to be released in 2026
- Moosalamoo (GMNF)
 - Several grant and donation-funded trail repairs, expanded trail network with new connector trail

- Laurie secured a \$10,000 grant to revitalize the equine campsite (brush clean up, stump removal, etc.)
- Leftover grant funds were used for trail work on 2.5 mile connector trail at Silver Lake
- Five culverts were installed with ditching to address water/environmental issues
- Eliminates 5-6 miles of dirt road riding
- Updated map to be released in 2026
- Victory State Forest
 - Lunenburg Polar Bears VAST club granted permission to use their parking area for horse trailers, and agreed to help maintain it during the summer
 - A new horse trailer parking sign was installed
 - Several trail repairs to improve footing were completed
 - Mapping project planned for 2026
 - Can ride on dirt roads from parking area into Victory State Forest trails or ride on the class 4 road loop that was created around the parking area (no need to enter forest)
 - Polar Bears received the 2025 VAST Comradery Award for working with VHC on this project (VHC mentioned on plaque located in Lunenburg Community Room)
- Jericho Research Forest
 - Obtained a grant for trail repairs through the Northern Forest Center (funds are currently held up in federal government bureaucracy)
 - Will connect JRF to Mobbs Farm trails
 - The plan is to address water run-off and muddy areas with trail re-route and horse-suitable boardwalks
- Little River State Park
 - Obtained permission for additional trailer parking
- Other Trails
 - Linsey is working on gravel road riding information for mud season/hunting season alternatives
 - Example: Creek Road in Middlebury (good parking, flat, low traffic, suitable for driving)
 - Member-only trails (private land access):
 - Marshfield (next to Groton State Forest) - camping available
 - Elmore (~450 acres, tons of trails) - one-night maximum camping or day use
 - Access through member login on website under member resources
 - Washington Forest (near the Bunkhouse):
 - No parking (not widely advertised)
 - Bunkhouse guests have permission to use trails
 - EquiLab app for trail mapping and sharing local trails with other members

10:58am - 2025 Equine Industry Committee Accomplishments - Heidi

- The committee currently has eight active members, and is focusing their efforts on changing the definition of agriculture to include equine farm businesses in the state legislation.
 - Currently, equine-based businesses pay significantly higher property taxes than other agricultural-based businesses like dairy farms, even though they also maintain similar open lands for farming and four-legged animals that eat hay
 - In recent years, this has hurt the viability of the equine industry and is forcing many business owners to close up shop or move away.
- Recent Progress

- Gained traction by bringing equine farm business owners to testify before the State House Agriculture Committee
- Countered the "wealthy horse people" stereotype by clarifying that this change in status is targeting businesses earning 50%+ of personal income from horses and maintaining open working land
- Received strong interest/support from House Ag Committee
- A House Committee member contacted VHC after the testimony with a draft bill
- The newest draft addresses language gaps in the current law, expands beyond breeding-only businesses (boarding, lessons, therapeutic riding, trail rides, etc.), and reflects actual Vermont equine business models
- The 2025 bill didn't crossover (no fault of VHC), but made it further than any other similar bill has so far
- To continue with this traction, the EIC is working with Maggie Lenz (professional lobbyist) to have regular/consistent face-to-face conversations with legislators
 - Cost to retain services for the year will be about \$18,000, which will require significant fundraising efforts
 - This does raise concerns about having to start a new non-profit separate from VHC (501(c)(3) based on rules relating to non-profit lobbying activities
 - The Vermont Law School has donated 10 hours of free legal assistance to help navigate the 501(c)(4) or (6) organization structure questions
 - If/when this new organization is created they will be looking for someone who is interested in serving as treasurer

11:15am - 2025 Concerns - Jeannette

- Work on increasing membership for financial sustainability
 - Adding value for business memberships
- Liability Insurance Coverage
 - Ensure that VHC has the correct type and amount of coverage for the events we plan to host
- Attendance at VHC sponsored events
 - Engage with the membership to get them interested in participating in VHC events, so all of our work and planning isn't for nothing
- Board Burnout
 - Avoid letting everything fall on the board and instead find new ways to get members involved with VHC activities (sweat equity versus donation based)

11:18am - 2026 Goals and Membership Input - Jeannette

- Copies of 2026 proposed goals and membership interests were available in person, see link below.
- Member suggestions:
 - Hold more collaborative events with other clubs or riding groups
 - Work on having a bigger presence in the local community by more clearly communicating what VHC does and what we advocate for
 - Consider coordinating with other well known organizations/sponsors
 - Increase social media presence to help reach a broader/younger audience
 - Encourage more word of mouth involvement with brochures and flyers

11:35am - Voting - Heidi

- Slate of Candidates:
 - President (2-year term): Michelle Brewster
 - Vice President (1-year term): Jeannette Cole
 - Secretary (1-year term): Emma O'Neill
 - Director #1 (3-year term): Ryan Kessler
 - Director #2 (3-year term): Robin Severy
- Continuing Board Members (not up for election):
 - Treasurer: Mikayla Pick (1 year remaining - 2026)
 - Director #3: Linsey Williams (1 year remaining - 2026)
 - Director #4: Laurie Baird (1 year remaining - 2026)
 - Director #5: Lisa Lafont (2 years remaining - 2027)
 - Director #6: Monica Raymond (2 years remaining - 2027)
 - Director #7: Kerrie Garvey (2 years remaining - 2027)
- Each board member briefly introduced themselves to the membership.
- Heidi called for nominations from the floor for each position individually, and no additional nominations were made in person or via Zoom.
- Motion to elect the slate of officers as presented was made and seconded, followed by unanimous approval.

11:45am - Adjournment of Business Meeting

11:50am - Door Prize Raffle - Linsey + Monica

- Several larger door prizes were raffled off by picking names out of a bowl

11:55am - Lunch Break - All

- Potluck style lunch hosted by board members

12:35pm - Emerging and Zoonotic Equine Diseases Presentation - Dr. Jenny Wilkinson

- See link below

2:20pm - Conclusion of Activities

Links:

- 2025 VHC Year in Review:
<https://vthorsecouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/2025-VHC-annual-meeting.pdf>
- 11.01.25 Retreat Meeting Minutes - 2026 Goals:
<https://vthorsecouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/11.01.25-BoD-Retreat-Minutes.pdf>
- Emerging and Zoonotic Equine Disease:
<https://vthorsecouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Emerging-and-Zoonotic-Diseases-VHC-January-2026.pdf>