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# Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
## Sunday, September 21, 2025, 9 am – 2:30 pm
## Canada Olympic Park, Markin MacPhail Centre, Shane Homes boardroom

**Vision**

United by our passion for equines, we foster an inclusive community where everyone thrives together.

**Mission**

AEF supports Alberta's equine community through programs, education, and resources that promote horse welfare, sustainability, and meaningful connections among members.

**Five - year goal**

By 2030, AEF will strengthen its financial foundation by growing revenue streams, increasing membership value, and establishing reserves to support future programs and community initiatives.

1. Call to Order

Jason called the meeting to order at 9:01 am. Jennifer read the AEF Land Acknowledgement aloud. Following that, Jason asked the Board to declare any conflicts of interest with regards to any of the agenda items listed. None were heard.

In Attendance: Jason Edworthy (President), Sandy Bell (Past President), Ally Penic (Secretary), Cailin Kopetski (Director), Kate Wood (Director), Louise Caplan (Director), Lindsay Seidel-Wassenaar (Director), Jennifer Dimopoulos (Director),
Pat Buffalo (Director), Sonia Dantu (Executive Director, non-voting), and Flo Scherpenisse (Recording Secretary, non-voting)
Absent with Regrets: Brooke Hartwick (Treasurer), Anne Stone (Director), and Claire Goddard (Director)

2. Agenda – Motion to approve – **September 21, 2025**

The following changes to the September 21, 2025 meeting agenda were proposed:

- Section 5b: Treasurer's Report – Financial Statements should be dated July 31, 2025 instead of August 31, 2025.
- Section 7b: Business Arising – Equine Emergency Funding: Tabled for a future meeting.
- Section 8c: New Business – Scholarship Committee Report: Tabled for a future meeting.

**MOTION: Jennifer moved to approve the September 21, 2025 meeting agenda with the noted changes.**
**Pat 2nd. In favor (9); Against (0); Abstain (0). Unanimous. Approved.**

3. Minutes – Motion to approve – **June 19, 2025**

**MOTION: Cailin moved to approve the June 19,2025 meeting minutes with no additions or amendments.**
**Louise 2nd. In favor (9); Against (0); Abstain (0). Unanimous. Approved.**

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**MOTION: Kate moved to delete the following explanatory portion from Section 6 of the April 26 meeting minutes due to the impact it had on Patrick.**
**Patrick 2nd. In favor (9); Against (0); Abstain (0). Unanimous. Approved.**

The deleted section referenced was, *“Board members noted that Patrick had limited attendance at meetings in 2024 and asked about the potential for increased engagement in the coming year. It was shared that Patrick is aware of the expectations for Board members, including regular meeting attendance and active participation in committees and task forces. The board was advised that, if appointed, Patric is committed to making a strong effort to meet these expectations in 2025.*

*Some Board members also raised concerns around ongoing technology challenges. While technical support had not yet been discussed with Patrick, it was suggested that a test Zoom call or an early phone check-in prior to the June meeting could be helpful. These suggestions were offered in a spirit of support, with the goal of ensuring Patrick feels set up for success as an active and engaged member of the Board.”*

4. President’s Report - verbal

Jason highlighted the following points in his Presidents Report:

- On June 24, 2025, Jason met with Minister of Forestry and Parks, Todd Loewen, to discuss Parks Canada’s ten-year plan where he advocated for AEF members as valued trail users and an important recreational community. There was particular interest in the AEF’s Economic Impact Study which contributes approximately $1.3 B/ year to Alberta’s gross domestic product (GDP) and the fact that the AEF’s membership are paying members.
- In early September, Jason participated in meetings with Julia Harvie-Schemko (Red Thread Connections) and the executive committee where preparations were made for this weekend’s strategic planning meeting and board meetings.
- With regret, Jason informed the Board of perceived conflicts of interest experienced by Jennifer in her role as President Elect and as an employee of ACERA. As such, he advised that she has made the difficult decision to resign as President Elect. He further inquired that if there are other Board members considering this role, to make their interest known to him.

**MOTION: Cailin moved to accept the President’s Report as verbally presented.**
**Kate 2nd. In favor (9); Against (0); Abstain (0). Unanimous. Approved.**

5. Treasurer's Report

Ally presented the Treasurer’s Report on behalf of Brooke.

a. 2025 Auditor Motion – Michael Ihekuna, CPA, MBA

The following topics were discussed:

- Clarification was sought as to the reason why AEF missed the required audits over the past six-years. Sonia provided additional explanation in that it was not an oversight nor was it a requirement but rather, it was due to the AEF’s annual revenue over the last few years where the AEF, amongst other Alberta PSO’s were granted an exemption for this requirement. However, in 2024, the AEF’s accountant recommended that AEF conduct an audit in 2026 for its 2025 financial statements.

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- It was suggested that the Board, as opposed to only the Finance Committee, be able to see the audit plan in its entirety prior to execution of the audit. In doing so, the Board would be aware of focus areas, tolerance levels, and the like. Sonia provided further information and advised that the operational audit process has already started and in time, the auditor will also be providing a presentation to the Board. Jason noted that the 2025 audit process continues to be an ongoing learning process for this Board.
- Due to the attendant costs associated with a formal audit - both operationally and fiscally, there was strong consensus against conducting an annual audit for the AEF.

**MOTION: Ally motioned to appoint Michael Ihekuna, CPA, MBA, as the 2025 auditor for the AEF's Financial Statements.**
**Lindsay 2nd. In favor (9); Against (0); Abstain (0). Unanimous. Approved.**

b. July 31, 2025, Financial Statements

Ally highlighted the following points in her presentation of the July 31, 2025 financial statements:
- This is the sixth consecutive year where the AEF continues to be operating in a net deficit and as such, this is not sustainable.
- At the halfway point through 2025, it was noted that while the financials may appear somewhat alarming for forecasting purposes, this is normal due to the nature of the AEF where a significant portion of revenue still needs to be earned in Q3 and where expenses need to be spent.

c. 2026 DRAFT Budget

Ally provided a brief, high-level overview of the 2026 draft budget highlighting both revenue and expenses:
- Revenue: Casino funds earned in December 2025 are expected to be received in 2026 and recognized on the income statement when expenses are posted for rent.
- An approximate 3% increment in membership is anticipated goal for 2026.
- An increment is expected in terms of sales revenue in 2026.
- AEF has plans to conduct more clinics for officials in 2026.
- Expenses: Increases are anticipated for marketing and promotions in an effort to extend AEF's reach and visibility.
- Increases are anticipated to capital assets expenses due to the required replacement of outdated office computers.
- In an effort to further mitigate costs, the only planned trade show/event for 2026 will be AEF's attendance at Horse Expo.
- Additionally, there is the possibility of Alberta Bits to go entirely digital in 2027 as a cost recovery measure once the contract expires in 2026.
- Overall, the anticipated expenses for 2026 are expected to be on par with that of 2025.

Following this, there was considerable discussion in the following areas related to the 2026 draft budget:
- Jason noted the significant reduction in the 2026 draft budget for Board meetings (line 5050) from approximately $16K to $2K. Strong unanimous consensus was noted with regards to the importance of at least one in-person meeting per year. In doing so, this would facilitate positive group dynamics and inform how Board members interact with each other on Zoom meetings. A

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few suggestions were made to offset the attendant costs of in-person meetings by getting a sponsor. Sonia suggested that the Finance Committee amend this line item to approximately $7K and consider redirecting deferred funds that have been earmarked for eligible expenses such as leadership development (line 4615).

- Sandy expressed the importance of building reserve through donations. Sonia provided an explanation as to why Sport – Athlete Development (line 5610) reflected such a dramatic decrease since 2023. Donations should be first entered on the balance sheet as donations and subsequently moved to the income statement when used. However, in 2024, this did not occur as full donations were shown on the income statement versus balance sheet.
- To this end, a robust discussion ensued with regards to reallocating deferred funds to various eligible expenses which in turn would create a bookkeeping surplus. In doing so, this would provide approximately $120K in short-term relief on the 2026 budget. Additionally, this would provide better transparency with regards to the nature of the deferred funds but still emphasize the importance of building up reserves in order to satisfy the various accounting ratios. At present, the AEF's current ratio (goal is = $\geq$ 1.0) sitting at 0.9. This means the AEF decreased ability to pay for its expenses and meet its short-term obligations. In terms of a cash reserve or an emergency fund, the AEF would require approximately $300K for a 3–6-month operational reserve.
- Further discussion also occurred with regards to the AEF's $60K GIC when it matures in November 2025. There was lively debate on whether or not to utilize that cash on hand to offset the budget deficits and shortfalls or to simply not touch those funds.

**ACTION: Sonia to amend the budget with an increment of approximately $7K-$8K for the purpose of an in-person board meeting in the 2026 budget.**

d. 2026 Membership Fees

- At present individual memberships cost $68.25 for an individual adult and $57.75 per individual youth/ person with an expiration date of Dec 31. Energetic discussion occurred exploring both sides of the argument with regards to the proposed increment in membership fees for 2026:
- <u>For Membership Fee Increase</u>: It was emphasized that given AEF's financial situation, an increase in membership fees would be the most sustainable revenue stream.
- It was discussed that for every $5 increment in annual membership fees, assuming membership remains unchanged, this would translate to a $50K-$60K of additional revenue for AEF. This would go a long way in addressing the ongoing and anticipated budget deficits in 2026. Examples provided included a $10-$20/ membership fee increment which would add approximately $100K-$200K in additional revenue to the 2026 budget. It was also mentioned that increases in insurance expenses are anticipated in 2026.
- Frequency (i.e. every 3-5 years vs. annually) and amount of membership fee increment ($5-$15/ membership) were discussed.
- <u>Against Membership Fee Increase</u>: Strong concern was expressed in that by increasing membership fees with no additional value in AEF's offering, there may be a chance memberships will decrease. In which case, it would be hoped that members would be remain loyal to AEF and continue to renew their membership despite an increment.

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- Sonia provided additional rationale to not pursue a membership increase in 2026. They included: Increased economic pressures felt by membership and in light of this she highlighted that optional memberships (vs. required membership) may suffer as a result of this. Also, with the past two year issues with the AEF database and website, AEF needs to rebuild trust and value with its membership before increasing membership fees. It was noted that with the exception of Ontario, no other equestrian PTSO's across the country are increasing their membership fees for 2026.
- It was suggested that the Board consider the auditor's feedback prior to making any decisions on this important matter.

**ACTION: Due to the uncertainty expressed by the Board around budget and recognizing deferred funds, the budget will go back to the Finance Committee for further consideration and to work on targets that are aligned by AEF's strategic plan.**

**MOTION: Ally moved to approve the July 31, 2025, Financial Statements as previously circulated and as presented.**
**Jennifer 2nd. In favor (9); Against (0); Abstain (0). Unanimous. Approved.**

**MOTION: Ally moved to approve a proposed increase to Membership fees for 2026 as presented.**
**Kate 2nd. In favor (3); Against (4); Unanimous. Motion defeated.**

6. Operations Report - verbal

Sonia presented a brief high-level overview of the Operations Report which highlighted the following areas:

- Direct Deposit: Direct deposit option has been operationally rolled out for vendors.
- Bursaries: Funding and bursary recipients (Individual Member, Club and Western Bursary) are coming up with payouts in October 2025.
- Alberta Bits: The latest issue of Alberta Bits recently came out which featured a section by Patrick Buffalo on Indigenous culture.
- Social Media: Social media activity has been strong especially on Facebook largely due to posts on the National Coaching Symposium.
- AEF's New Website: The new website has been live for approximately 2 months and already, it has been instrumental in tracking engagement and planning future events.
- 2026 Membership Platform (HorseReg): This platform is in development and is awaiting information with regards to membership fee increases if any.
- Trail Safety Initiatives: These initiatives were delivered in Bragg Creek and went well.
- Safe Sport: HUB initiative is progressing with Momentum which will streamline courses, coaching pathways, and participant tracking.
- National Coaching Symposium: There was excellent attendance at this event with 150 attendees when it was anticipated that initially, only 50 would attend. The event was very well executed with great feedback received from attendees.
- Wildrose Competitions: To date, there have been 70 events which generated approximately $28K in fees.

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- New Strategic Partnership: New partnerships noted with Empower Equine, Xibition Inc., and Ride IQ which continue to expand opportunities for coaches, riders, and organizers.
- AEF Strategic Plan: Sonia to meet with Julia to potentially adjust the office operational staff structure.

Jason also mentioned the staff had noted an AEF golf fundraising event in the future. At present, this initiative is in the very early stages of development.

**MOTION: Pat moved to accept the Operations Report as verbally presented.**
**Cailin 2nd. In favor (9); Against (0); Abstain (0). Unanimous. Approved.**

7. Business Arising
   a. Committees/Task Forces – TOR Reviews

Kate provided a brief explanation and denoted the differences between committees and task forces. Committees report to the Board whereas Task Forces reported to management and are in part similar to working committees.
ACTION: Task Force Chairs to refer to the TOR template in the Board Portal and convene meetings to update TOR's as applicable by the next board meeting.

   b. Equine Emergency Funding

This topic is tabled to a future meeting.

   c. Meet a Horse – Update

Louise provided an update on the Meet a Horse initiative and advised of the following:

- Last week, Kenda Lubeck (Communications and Engagement Manager) contacted the University of Calgary Veterinary Medicine (UCVM) outreach coordinator who continued to express keen interest with no progress made on moving this initiative forward. However, it is anticipated that there will be some progress in the next 2 months.
- Louise continues to work with Gavin Pearson (Project and Event Coordinator) to schedule a meeting for this task force.
- UCVM has expressed interest in participating in AEF educational initiatives in the area of content creation.
- Louise also mentioned possible grant opportunities to be explored.

Discussion: A suggestion was made for this initiative to occur during Aggie Days, a family-friendly event during the Calgary Stampede that celebrates and educates attendees about agriculture. Another suggestion was made to participate in UCVM's open house in 2027. Louise to follow up.

**MOTION: Pat moved to accept Louise's report and update with regards to the Meet a Horse pilot program.**
**Ally 2nd. In favor (9); Against (0); Abstain (0). Unanimous. Approved.**

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d. Casino Dates and Volunteers follow up

Sonia shared that an email has been sent out to past casino volunteers and members who have indicated their consent as volunteers. Approximately 22 volunteers are needed and volunteer positions are in the process of being confirmed. Casino dates are December 3-4, 2025.

**MOTION: Pat moved to accept Sonia's report and update with regards to the AEF's casino dates. Cailin 2nd. In favor (9); Against (0); Abstain (0). Unanimous. Approved.**

8. New Business

a. Other Committee Reports

i. Industry Task Force

Sandy noted that to date, no meeting has been scheduled with the Industry Task Force.

However, the AEF office has been in receipt of a an email from a member inquiring if AEF could circulate a petition on their behalf regarding concerns regarding the lack of government support for allied horse professionals under the Animal Keepers Act. AEF has since replied to the member citing its role to educate and not to regulate. Having said that, the Industry Task Force has been contacted to follow up on this matter.

**ACTION: Kenda to follow up with the task force about this matter.**

ii. Recreation Task Force

Louise provided an update on the Recreation Task Force's activities highlighting the following:

- Dr. Claire Windeyer is the newest member of the task force.
- Jason and Kelsey Noland (Chair) are working on an initiative to potentially restore an old wagon trail as an equestrian trail
- Bragg Creek Safety Day on August 9, 2025 was a success with the event promoting trail safety for multiple users.
- Kelsey continues to attend ongoing meetings with the Government of Alberta with regards to AEF's proposal as trail managers in the Panther Corners Public Land Use Zone (PLUZ). This may be a future revenue stream for AEF. However, in the meantime, there are more immediate potential opportunities to co-manage provincial trails with other recreational organizations.

b. Coaching Symposium

Sonia previously provided an update in the Operations Report. It was noted that the demographic of the event was primarily women.

c. Scholarship Committee report

This topic tabled for a future meeting.

d. Social Media Policy review

Jason reviewed the previously circulated Social Media Policy where the following discussion points were raised:

albertaequestrian.com
#120, 251 Midpark Blvd SE, Calgary, AB T2X 1S3

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- An inquiry was made as to how this policy extended to AEF's relationship and its affiliation with Equestrian Canada (EC)? It was clarified that this policy applies directly to AEF only and not to EC. As such, there was no need to amend the verbiage of this policy.
- Under the heading Board of Directors – Governance Role, a suggestion was made to relocate the 4th bullet about the promotion of businesses on social media because it had nothing to do about governance per se.
- An inquiry was made as to who moderates the content of social media replies to posts. It was explained that staff provide strategic oversight and manage content.
- Board members were encouraged to share AEF's social media posts.
- To help office staff, a brief brainstorming session was conducted for possible future social media content. Ideas generated included featuring individual members highlighting horse-related questions, horses in seasonal costumes with pictures, spotlight featuring business members, club members along with promotion of club events. Other possible topics included equestrian-related newsworthy posts along with related disciplines (i.e. mounted archery).

e. Strategic Planning Wrap up

Jennifer provided a brief high-level overview with regards to the outcome of yesterday's strategic planning session. Moving forward, AEF has clearer direction in terms of sustainable revenue streams, continued connection with its membership and membership value along with the creation of a fund-raising task force.

f. Nominations Committee Appointment

Jason explained that every year, the President is required to appoint Board members to the nominations committee. The work on this committee is seasonal from mid-December to early January. Sonia encouraged the Board to consider the skills matrix when considering potential new Board members. Specifically, to consider what desirable and transferrable expertise or skills might benefit the Board and the fact that the nominee does not necessarily need to be a "*horse person*." Examples of this may include an individual with proven past experience in fundraising, sponsorship, governance and government relations. Claire, Cailin and Jennifer volunteered to participate in this committee.

9. Adjournment

Some light discussion occurred with regards to naming the fund-raising task force. At this point, the official name is yet to be confirmed. Sandy, Ally, and Lindsay volunteered to participate in this task force.

Hearing no further questions or comments, Jason adjourned the meeting at 1:46 pm.