

Greater Richmond Aquatic League

Annual Board of Directors Meeting

September 15, 2024, at Burkwood

Next Board Meeting Monday January 6th, 2024 at 7pm at Federal Club

The Greater Richmond Aquatic League (GRAL) is an organization of swimmers, coaches, and parents whose aim is to promote and participate in the sport of summer swimming. GRAL provides an opportunity for young people to compete against others of similar ability in an atmosphere of fair play, good sportsmanship, and safety.

Meeting called to order at 7:00pm

Roll Call:

- Present: AshCreek, Ashland, Atlee, Battlefield Green, Canterbury, Church Run, Colonies, Federal Club, Fox Hall, Goochland, Hanover, Hungary Creek, Kings Charter, Mechanicsville, Milestone, Old Church, Pebble Creek, Raintree, Rockville Dolphin Club, Tuckahoe Village West, Twin Hickory, Wellesley, Wembly, Wyndham
- Absent: Bell Creek, Burkwood, Chestnut Oaks, Dominion Club

President Report: Julie Zubris (Rockville) president@gralva.com

- THANK YOU for a successful 2025 season! It was very challenging with new software, a huge learning curve for teams and us at the league, and some unprecedented weather issues. Thank you to all of you for your work during the year and your patience. Please pass on a huge thank you to the leadership at your individual pools. Thank you to the exec board for their many, many hours of work during this season. And thank you to Ralph, who has dedicated countless hours to learning SwimTopia and trying to fill gigantic shoes.
- Please remember that when we engage in discussions about various suggestions and ideas, you need to review them with your team to determine your teams' feelings in preparation of potential votes at future meetings. We have a lot of suggestions and recommendations to present tonight. When we head into monthly meetings beginning in January, It is up to you as board members to bring up items for a vote. If your team wants to see a rule change, you need to initiate a motion.
- Weather: Weather was not a friend to GRAL this year. There was a lot of frustration over how to handle hot and stormy weather. This is a reminder that there are no GRAL rules about when a team practices with regards to air or water temperature, whether hot or cold. Those decisions are made by the

individual teams. And as always, if families are concerned with the weather, they are never required to participate. They are always free to make the decision that is best for their family. It is up to you to make sure you clearly communicate that to your families so they are not so angry with GRAL. And finally, GRAL meets on a very tight deadline to make the season happen, especially at meet 6. So canceling is always a last resort and it is impossible to extend the deadline past Wednesday. We were accused of a irrational lack of flexibility by multiple people, who do not have all the details to understand that it is not irrational. It is almost impossible to pull off Champs with only 10 days from the last meet—any less than that really would be impossible. The only way to provide more flexibility is to add an extra week between the last meet and Champs. That has been discussed in the past and rejected by the board, but it can always be brought up for discussion again.

- Board member asked if the last meet can be on Monday instead of Tuesday. Julie recommended if the league would like to require that, they can make a motion at the Jan meeting and vote on it. Think about logistics and talk to your coaches. Do we want to legislate a one-off situation? First time in memory that both Tuesday and Wednesday of week 6 had problematic weather. What is the likelihood it will happen again in the near future? Teams would be allowed to host on Monday in that situation, but do we want to require it? If week 5 has bad weather and meets are pushed off until Thursday (or even Saturday morning, which was happened in the past), would teams want to be required to have the next meet on Monday, especially if both week 5 and 6 are home meets?
- Survey: Several teams have requested info about coaches salaries. A few years ago we offered a survey on this topic and provided the info to all teams who participated in the survey and plan to do that again. The survey will be sent out this week, so please look for it in your email. It will be sent to board reps and parent reps, but please only submit one form per team. Once we receive all the responses, we will compile the information and share it to all teams who submitted a survey. If you have a specific question you would like included on the survey, email president within the next 48 hours.
- Handbook requires that the schedule be posted by February, but there are always requests for it earlier. Therefore, this year it will be posted on the website by October 1st.
- This is my last meeting as president. Thank you to those who supported me the last two years in my goal of improving and simplifying GRAL. I know that I didn't do everything perfectly, and I made lots of mistakes, but I can honestly say I did the best I could. Although we still have lots more work to do to improve and simplify our league, I hope that I have left it better than I found it.
- July meeting minutes: Federal club motion to approve, TVW second. None opposed. Accepted into the record.

Secretary Report: Michelle Shores (Battlefield Green) secretary@gralva.com Any new people taking over positions for your team for the 2026 season can be changed as roles in SwimTopia at any time.

Treasurer Report: Cindy Anderson (Raintree) treasurer@gralva.com

The budget will be discussed later in the meeting.

VP of Officials Report: Tom Connolly (Pebble Creek) officials@gralva.com none

VP of Training and Certification: Debi Knott (Wembly) training@gralva.com absent

VP of Equipment Report: Moira Sweazey (Hanover) equipment@gralva.com Much better this year with ribbons and supplies.

VP of Champs Report: Heather Jensen (Church Run) champs@gralva.com absent

Computer Coordinator Report: Ralph Jones ralph@gralva.com ST has been a challenge but overall a better year with the program. Learned a lot and will continue to work with ST over the off season. Thank you to Julie for all the hard work as president.

Old Business:

- None

New Business

- **2026 Exec Board:**
 - New President—Roy Sabo (Milestone): Federal club motion, TVW second, unanimous vote to approve
 - Past President—Julie Zubris (Rockville): no vote required
 - New Secretary—Sarah Butler (Mechanisville): co-VP of Champs last year, stepping into secretary role. Federal club Motion, Atlee second, unanimous vote to approve
 - Treasurer—Open, no one has stepped up. You need to take this to your teams because we MUST have a treasurer. There are 3,000+ swimmers in this league—there must be a parent willing to step up and help. This does not require too much time (maybe 1-2 hours a month) and is streamlined now.
 - VP of Officials—Tom Connolly (Pebble Creek) returning: no vote required
 - New VP of Certification—Steve Harness (Bell Creek): Federal club motion, Atlee second, unanimous vote to approve
 - VP of Technology and Equipment—Mark from Colonies has agreed to do Technology and Moira will stay on as equipment and they will co lead. Federal club motion, Atlee second, unanimous vote to approve
 - VP of Champs—Heather Jensen (Church Run): no vote required
- **2026 GRAL Board Meeting Dates** (tentative plan—dates likely to stick, but in person/virtual may change)
 - Monday, January 5th (in person, at Federal Club)
 - Monday, February 2nd (in-person because we collect dues)
 - Monday, March 2nd (virtual)
 - Monday, April 6th (virtual)
 - Monday, May 4th (TBD)

- Monday, June 1st (in-person because registration is collected and we hand out ribbons)
- Monday, July 6th (in-person)
- **2026 Meet Dates** (schedule will be posted on website by October 1st)
 - Meet 1: Wednesday, June 3rd
 - Meet 2: Wednesday, June 10th
 - Meet 3: Wednesday, June 17th
 - Meet 4: Wednesday, June 24th
 - Meet 5: Wednesday, July 1st
 - Meet 6: Tuesday, July 7th (must be on Tuesday due to tight timeline for Champs)
 - Champs: Saturday, July 18th and Sunday, July 19th
- **Grey Oaks**—pool in Short Pump area that has had their own team the last couple of years. They would like to join GRAL, but do not have enough swimmers for their own team and no trained officials. They are interested in possibly joining with another team in a situation similar to Rockville and the Dolphin Club. We recommend they should have the fall to gauge interest with teams and then if they find a possible partner, it would be placed on the January agenda for a vote.
- **2026 GRAL Divisions**—formula is laid out in the handbook. We need two divisions of 6 and two of 8. Using standard deviation, we find the most natural (and competitive) breaks for those divisions.
 - Division 1: Ashland, Burkwood, Canterbury, Church Run, Colonies, Hungary Creek, Raintree, Wyndham
 - Division 2: Ashcreek, Atlee, Chestnut Oaks, Fox Hall, Kings Charter, Milestone, Rockville Dolphin Club, Twin Hickory,
 - Division 3: Dominion Club, Federal Club, Goochland, Old Church, Pebble Creek, Wellesley
 - Division 4: Battlefield Green, Bell Creek, Hanover, Mechanicsville, Tuckahoe Village West, Wembly
- **Handbook Updates:** The handbook requires significant updates to accurately reflect changes in processes due to the transitions to SwimTopia. We would like a committee to work on that in the off season so that we can bring suggested changes to the board for a vote at the January meeting. Email Julie at president@gralva.com if you or someone on the board is interested in serving.
- **Registration Fees**—currently at \$7 for GRAL, plus additional for ST (ST will be \$3 per swimmer in 2026).
 - Going into 2025, we created a budget, knowing we would have a deficit, but had almost \$44k in the bank and decided to use that as cushion. After the season, we are now down to \$34k in the account.
 - The only major over budget item was medals (ribbons was only on budget due to cutting out the boxes). Likely that there will be an increase in medals and ribbons again.
 - Because teams were very upset about possible increases last year, exec board recommendation to increase by \$1 in 2026 and \$1 in 2027 and then reassess finances. Discussion among teams that \$1 will not cover deficit and we should consider raising the prices more for 2026. Vote required at January meeting.

- **SwimTopia**

- Time to lock entries—currently is 24 hours before the meet begins. New deadline will be 1pm the day of the meet. No vote required.
- Moving forward, all event entries are required to be entered directly into SwimTopia—no importing of entries allowed. No vote required.
- Ralph and exec board will be working with ST during the off season, so likely more changes will come as we streamline the processes. We have submitted requests for changes that we would like to see for next year.
- Clarification that if teams use the SwimTopia site to register their swimmers, they are considered GRAL competition swimmers and are required to pay the GRAL registration fee (and not just the ST fee). If teams have noncompetitive teams or lessons programs, they need to find a different way to register those swimmers (if they don't want to pay the GRAL registration fee). Church Run had sent a written proposal asking for this to be changed, but the league answer was no in a reply email. They stated their dissatisfaction with this answer during the meeting. There is a lot of additional work across the exec board and the computer consultant to handle competitive vs. noncompetitive swimmer rosters. It is not feasible for those at the league to have to take on this additional work. Other teams used google forms/sheets in 2025 to manage their noncompetitive swimmers. The policy for this is final.
 - NOTE: After the meeting, a possible solution was discussed. Teams could contact SwimTopia and create a separate team not affiliated with GRAL. They would still pay \$3 per swimmer, plus an additional \$150 for the team per year. Depending on the number of swimmers on a separate roster (diving team, lessons, etc.), it may be more cost effective for teams to handle the situation that way if they are opposed to something like google sheets.

- **S&T Judges**

- S&T official: currently certifies and then has to complete class every other year. Recommendation to require new S&T to complete the certification process (class only, NOT shadow walks the second year) two years in a row and then move to every other year. Vote required.
 - Rationale: S&T can be an overwhelming job to learn and because there is such a long break between seasons, 2nd year S&T often feel that they don't remember everything. We are looking for ways to support our S&T judges in ways that can maintain/improve quality but not place an undue burden on our volunteers.
- Will place a notation on officials list for 1st and 2nd year S&T judges so that referees are aware and can provide additional support as needed. No vote required.
- Reminder that new (1st/2nd year) S&T should be placed diagonally across the pool from each other rather than next to each other when possible.

- **Champs**

- Moving forward, will only be held in **yards**—we will not switch between meters and yards. This is due to many logistical reasons with both GRAL and SwimRVA and aligns with our stated goal of simplifying our league. No vote required.

- Due to transition to SwimTopia, for sake of simplicity and logistics, we need to change the Champs seed time. Currently the seed time is the fastest time from the current season OR the previous year's Champs (whichever is fastest). Recommendation to only use the fastest time from the current season. Vote required to change handbook, but is a change that needs to happen due to change in software.
- After a huge learning curve this year with a “no Christy” Champs, we know that other changes to will be coming in 2026. We will provide more details as they become available. One change is that teams' Champs Coordinators need to be assigned by the beginning of the season and there will be a Champs Coordinators meeting early in the season rather than waiting until the very end.
- **League Divisions**—current calculation formula in the handbook:

$$\frac{\text{Total Club Points} \times (100)}{\text{Total League Points}} + \frac{\text{Club \# Swimmers} \times (100)}{\text{League \# Swimmers}} = \text{Division Calculation}$$

$$[(\text{Current year's Point/Swimmer Results}) \times .75] + [(\text{Previous year's Point/Swimmer Results}) \times .25] = 2 \text{ year weighted average Ranking Number used for determining next season's club divisions.}$$
 - Recommendation to remove relays from total club points unless all teams complete all relays all season. Vote required. (Note—this will not affect division relay awards, this is only referring to determining league divisions from one year to the next).
 - Rationale: if weather prevents a meet(s) from completing relays, teams' points are skewed compared to teams who completed all relays. If some teams in a division completed relays, but others didn't, the teams who don't have relay points are unfairly penalized in points and thus determining division calculations.
- **Swimmer Divisions**—currently based on two years of swimmer times.
 - From handbook: “Times achieved at a GRAL meet during the current season, and the previous two (2) GRAL seasons (including Champs, if applicable) are used to determine a swimmer's classification.”
 - Recommendation to calculate swimmers' divisions based on only one year of times. Vote required.
 - Rationale: for swimmers who did swim year round, but no longer do, or who are recovering from an injury, etc. they can be stuck in a faster division than they can actually compete in for potentially up to 25 months.
- **Order of Events**—currently have 3 free events in odd meets and only 1 free event in even meets.
 - Recommendation to either:
 - 1) Switch the relays so that odd meets are medley relays and even meets are free relays—in that case may need to switch odd and even meets altogether as we would like the season to begin with free relays rather than medley.
 - 2) Switch the 100 IM to odd meets and long free to even meets.

- Rationale: hopefully will shorten meets since they would no longer have IMs, 100 back, 100 fly, and medley relays in the same meet and would guarantee at least 2 free events each meet, allowing the opportunity for less experienced swimmers to compete more. Vote required.
- **Relays**—recommendation to change the current relay system. Vote required.
 - Two options:
 - 1) Remove divisions altogether (possibly have more ribbon places and need to change points dispersal). Not recommended by exec board
 - 2) Move to a time standard system (the same as Champs). Still have two divisions—titled Novice and Varsity. Recommended by exec board with following restriction: **divisions of relays are set before meet begins and deck changes do not allow for division change** (same as current rule).
 - Rationale: there has been lots of discussion about how our relay system is the most complicated SwimTopia has seen and we have a stated goal of simplifying within our league for the sake of our volunteers at the team and league levels as well as the GRAL computer consultant.
 - A change to option 2 would align regular season relays to the same system used at Champs (but with only two divisions). That may make Champs relay building less onerous for inexperienced coaches if they only have one system to learn.
 - The recommendation to not allow division changes during the meet (with on deck swimmer changes) is to encourage fairness and discourage hyperstrategic finagling of relays by one team during a meet.
 - When relays are created in ST, the time will automatically calculate and show the the division, thus simplifying and hopefully streamlining the relay building process for coaches.
 - Discussing with SwimTopia the logistics and will update at January meeting if necessary
 - Also a recommendation to change the title of the divisions to simply Novice and Varsity to reduce confusion.

Good of the league

- Atlee would like to request that the league consider banning tech suits in GRAL except at Champs. Currently, GRAL does not have a specific statement on tech suits, which means that we follow USA Swimming bathing suit rules, which do not ban tech suits (under 12 the true tech suits are not allowed). A brief discussion ensued. Atlee is welcome to bring the issue up for a motion to vote at the January meeting.

Motion to adjourn by Atlee second by Federal club

Adjourned at 08:30pm

Respectfully submitted by Michelle Shores, GRAL Secretary