

PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION MEETING
COMMITTEE ROOM #2 – SAANICH MUNICIPAL HALL
THURSDAY JANUARY 11, 2024, 7:00 PM
DRAFT

In attendance: Robin Tunnicliffe in the Chair; Linda Geggie; Terry Michell; Jenni Michell; Katie Underwood; Dianne Williamson; Councillors Paltiel (C. Saanich), De Vries (Saanich) and Marshall (N.Saanich via TEAMS) and Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary.

Guests: Megan Halstead, Regional Agrologist; Andrea Pickard, Central Saanich Planner, (Via TEAMS) Cassidy Daskalchuck, Saanich Planning; Noah Broatman, CRD; Bob Maxwell; Shellie MacDonald, Haliburton Farms; Kathleen Zimmerman.

Regrets: Anita Bull; Larry Sluggett

Minutes: The Minutes of November 16, 2023 were adopted as circulated.

CHAIR'S REPORT – Robin Tunnicliffe

- She would like PAAC to aim high for 2024: be more proactive than reactive to agricultural issues – ie. opening up lines of communication with member municipalities and giving the council representatives time at each meeting to report on agricultural issues. Our agenda has been changed to reflect this by adding “Reports from Council Representatives” as well as a Chair's report.
- Basically PAAC has three areas of focus: **external threats** (geese, deer, water rates, drainage issues); **protecting the land base** (keeping farms viable, keeping abreast of new farming initiatives and trends (vertical and container farming for example); and finally **educating the public** (farm tour – turnout for 2023 disappointing, but it was still an excellent tour with many positive comments and on target with our mandate).
- A big success last year was supporting the initiation of a South Island Farmers' Institute, led by PAAC member Katie Underwood and associate member Shellie MacDonald. The Institute has enrolled 50+ farmers to date and is organizing and hosting the Farmer2Farmer event in February.
- For 2024, a review of our Terms of Reference is an urgent action item, with the last review being 10 years ago. She would like to strike a sub-committee to report back to the Commission about what – if anything – needs changing.
- She also suggested PAAC have a larger presence at Council meetings, not only to raise our profile, but to act as a resource where appropriate.
- She believes that PAAC continues to do important work; pats on the back all round and let's dig into 2024 with a mind set of being effective and proactive.

REPORTS FROM COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES

Councillor Paltiel, Central Saanich:

- The survey on Farm Worker Housing and gathering information from stakeholders is underway. Council will consider the input.
- Andrea Pickard, C. Saanich Planner, is here to speak to the District's Agricultural Land Survey.
- Proposed to update the Integrated Storm Water Management Plan, adopted in 2009. There are positive goals in the document on how to handle storm water, as it is acknowledged this had a big impact on local farmers.

- The District wants to maintain affordable agricultural water rates. The CRD may be looking at amending water rates this year.
- In response to a question about the Central Saanich Food Hub, he noted this will be a budget item this year. It makes sense to have a regional hub rather than fragmented, but this is not supported by all. The initial study, funded by a provincial grant and the taxpayers, reached the conclusion that a food hub, processing plant and abattoir were needed. Now there is no money to implement it and more provincial support will be needed. Perhaps we need to look at shared facilities for food processing and an abattoir.
- In response to a question about the length of time the District's governance review of PAAC will take, and the fact that in the meantime PAAC is working with 7 official members, he stated the review is not intended to slow things down and he doesn't think it will take a year. Staff are already working on it. He will report back at the next meeting.

Councillor De Vires stated:

- He has heard that the province is not going to support the development of more food hubs across the province.
- He asked the Planning representative to speak to other issues Saanich Council is working on.

The Planner stated:

- There are two draft reports to possibly permit road side stands within the Urban Containment Boundary as well as zoning amendments to establish farm markets.
- As well fence height in rural areas is being considered in order to protect crops from wildlife.

Councillor Marshall, North Saanich, stated:

- In November, Council asked for additional information about PAAC further to the Governance Review initiated by Central Saanich. Staff have offered to help with the governance review and are very supportive of the Commission.
- After meeting with the PAAC Chair, she now has a better understanding of PAAC's mandate.
- North Saanich Council has officially approved the appointment of two new members, Barry McLean and Kathleen Zimmerman.
- She understands the historical value of PAAC, the importance of agriculture and the benefit of having PAAC as an advisory committee.

TREASURER'S REPORT - Jenni Michell

Jenni reported PAAC has \$1,400 in its chequing account and \$17,315 in a Term Deposit, which made \$310 interest last year.

The Secretary reported that PAAC has approximately \$4,500 in its account held by Saanich. Unused funds are carried forward each year. This account is used to support educational events, such as the Farm Tour and the newly formed South Island Farmers Institute.

SPEAKER'S BUREAU:

Andrea Pickard, C. Saanich Planner – Agricultural Land Survey

Andrea stated:

- Central Saanich is looking to change its OCP and zoning bylaws on ALR land to more closely align with the revised provincial legislation in 2021. A public on-line survey has been held, 400 responses were received, the results of which have not yet been reviewed by Council.

- PAAC has already provided comments (November 2021) on the accessory dwelling issue, as well as on vertical farming (January 2023). She can recirculate the information available (staff reports and data analysis) so that PAAC can provide additional comments if necessary.
- Staff will be looking to amend the Temporary Use Permit process for Farm Worker Accommodation, permitting detached accessory buildings in agricultural zones, subject to certain conditions, without requiring approval from the ALC. Local governments can determine how they wish to amend their bylaws.
- Under the new legislation there are no restrictions on whether the accessory dwelling is used by a family member or a farm worker, but size is restricted to 90m²; for properties over 40ha this can be up to 186m². However, there are only two large farm properties in the District, so staff are recommending all properties are treated the same. There is an option to apply for a larger dwelling under certain conditions.
- Cottages or carriage houses are an option to having a secondary suite in the principal home.
- Andrea discussed the various options for the size and number of dwellings, which take into consideration the size of the property, existing accessory dwellings and lot coverage.
- In response to a comments from PAAC, she acknowledged that there could be completed surveys from those outside the boundaries, or perhaps multiple surveys from some people, but for the most part we rely on honesty from the people responding.
- An initial review of the responses, both ends of the spectrum are covered – from maintaining the status quo to protect farmland, to supporting larger accessory dwellings.
- Consideration will be given to location of dwellings on the site to ensure that productive farmland is not affected and is still viable, as well as the impact on the local aquifers, septic systems, farm roads and land values given additional users.

Summary:

Andrea stated she hopes to bring this matter to Council in late February, early March. She noted there are some technical questions outstanding that will be referred to the ALC for clarification. She will send the staff reports and other data to the secretary for circulation and will delay sending to Council in case PAAC has comments.

CORRESPONDENCE:

- a) **5550 West Saanich Road (Red Barn) – Proposal to Rezone a portion of the lot from A-1 to C1-R to regularize the current split zoning, and an amendment to increase the allowable floor area to allow increased floor area and liquor sales. A parking variance and one for setbacks for the existing barn are also requested.**

Background:

- The applicant has applied for a liquor licence (for the existing red roofed barn). However, the province has put a moratorium on licences at this time. There is an option to buy out another existing licence if one becomes available, but it could be many years before they get approval.
- PAAC supported a boundary adjustment on this property last year to incorporate the Red Barn under one title and to rectify the lease agreement with the adjacent property owner for the existing sewage treatment area.
- PAAC has been asked if they support, reject or have no position on the rezoning application.

PAAC Comments:

- The Commission did not object to the application, but had comments as follows:
 - No land will be taken out of production.
 - The area affected by the variances is on existing paved areas.
 - Concern that using the existing barn for liquor sales could impact the volume of animal feed stored and sold. The Red Barn is the only place locally to sell feed and bedding, otherwise people have to drive to Buckerfields or Bordens.
 - PAAC noted they wouldn't want to see the rezoning have an impact the agricultural services currently provided.
 - Parking could be an issue if and when liquor sales are permitted.

b) Appointment of Mike Doehnel to the SPWWC

After discussion with the CRD, it was noted that last year Mike was appointed for a two-year appointment, so no action was required.

c) Farmlands Trust – Request for Donation

***** Bob Maxwell excused himself from the meeting due to a conflict of interest*****

A letter was received from the Farmlands Trust requesting financial support.

Discussion noted

- The FLT has been growing food for the Food Banks and other recipient organizations, contributing 26,730 lbs of fresh produce grown on Newman Farm.
- Last time PAAC received a similar request, we donated seeds; we did not give cash.
- The request from FLT was a general appeal to many groups and organizations and it was felt that rather than give money, providing seeds would be just as valuable.
- Noted that Seedy Saturday is coming up soon, and leftover seeds could be donated.
- PAAC members offered to donate seeds, such as from Saanich Organics.

Action: PAAC members to look into obtaining seeds from various sources to donate to FLT; the Secretary to respond to them accordingly.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: CURRENT

a) Water update – Mike Doehnel (not present)

b) South Island Farmers' Institute – Katie Underwood & Shellie McDonald

- To date, the Sustainer Series has been well received (November and January); attendance good and participants stay after the meeting to chat and network. It is a way for farmers to voice concerns and challenges – irrigation woes, the higher costs of feed, fertilizer and supplies such as wax boxes. Many things have doubled or tripled in cost.
- Speakers at sessions held so far include Mike Doehnel, Larry Sluggett and John McKinnon.
- Katie noted as a small-scale producer it is hard to make connections, and these sessions have been very helpful.
- SIFI has plans to launch a business resiliency series – covering such topics as the cost of production and CRA requirements.

- As well, they are planning a innovation series in the summer, with on-site farm visits.
- They are hoping to access funding from the Ministry of Agriculture for the Sustainer Series.
- The meetings are open to anyone; a couple of people who were not farmers have attended.
- The main event this year will be the relaunch of the Farmer2Farmer workshop in February. SIFI has taken over the organization of this popular and well attended event from CR-Fair. The event was cancelled during COVID and this will be the first once since 2020.
- Workshops have still to be announced.
- In addition to the workshops and the conference, a mixer will be sponsored by IOPA.
- There will be 8 full days of activities across the south Island.
- She noted this would not be possible without PAAC's support and she thanked the Commission for providing funds to book the space at the Saanich Fairgrounds.
- SIFI currently has 47 members – they are hoping for more registrations at the F2F event.

c) CRD GOOSE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME – Jody Watson, CRD

The Chair reached out to Jody about the management programme as PAAC has not received any updates since the fall.

- Apparently Jody is working hard on the programme and has just hired a coordinator this week.
- Robin extended an invite for Jody to attend a PAAC meeting, and advised that farmers are frustrated with the number of geese continually landing in their fields – now with the addition of Snow Geese, and the fact that we have received no updates.

MOTION: Moved by Linda Geggie and Seconded by Terry Michell: “That PAAC send a letter to the CRD requesting that a CRD representative attend a meeting to provide an update on the Goose Management Programme, and also that we receive a monthly update on the progress of the Programme.”

CARRIED

d) CRD FOODLANDS ACCESS PROGRAMME – Noah Broatman

- The bylaw has been drafted and ready for review by the Board in March; hopefully after that the programme will be officially established as a CRD Service. This will be the first service at the CRD that has an agricultural mandate.
- Two of the first programmes will be Bear Hill for the Foodlands Access Programme and also a land matching grant programme for the Young Agrarians.
- The total we can ask for in support is \$1 million, but some will be kept in reserve for future programmes.
- Noah stated he is optimistic about the two proposed programmes.
- Once the Board has given approval we will be ready to launch.

Discussion ensued regarding the future of the **Royal Oak Golf Course lands**.

- Conversations are on-going about what to do with the land and its agricultural potential – which is questionable given the years of chemicals and pesticides used for the golf course and the fact that the property is surrounded by residences.
- The owners of the property know that the CRD is interested in the future of the lands; once the Access Programme is established then perhaps further discussions can take place.

OTHER BUSINESS

- a) **Vancouver Island Agriculture Adaptation Group – Bob Maxwell** advised he has not been in touch with the group for a while and has nothing to report.

Megan Halstead stated:

- The programme has been renamed the “Regional Extension Programme”; they met in December and things are moving slowly.
- Some of the projects they plan to look at include weather stations to predict extreme weather events, water (flooding and drought), and soil management.
- The plan is to hold workshops on the various issues.
- Over the past few years, new weather stations have been built on the Island.

- b) **Vancouver Island AgriService Newsletter – Meghan Halstead**

- Link to sign up: https://agriservicebc.campayn.com/contact_list_form/signup/110236

Megan stated:

- The Ministry is working with the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship (WLRS) on a Water Management Plan to bring awareness to farmers and WLRS staff about agricultural drought related issues, and the Water Sustainability Act.
- The Ministry is partnering on workshops – called Decoding Drought - on drought and possible emergency situations. There were water curtailments in two Island watersheds last year.
- Bob Maxwell noted he was interested in vegetable seed selections for the spring and whether the distributors have kept in mind climate change and making amendments accordingly. Megan offered to look into this.
- Terry Michell stated he is looking at different varieties of seed as well and is always changing the lettuce varieties due to climate change.

UPCOMING EVENTS/WEBINARS

- Farmer2Farmer – Saanich Fairgrounds – February, 15, 2024
- Island Agriculture Show – Cowichan Exhibition Grounds – February 2 and 3, 2024

NEXT MEETING: The next PAAC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, FEBRUARY 8, 2024 in Committee Room #2 at the Saanich Municipal Hall.

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting adjourned at 8:57 pm

Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary