

MINUTES
PENINSULA AND AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION

Held at Saanich Municipal Hall, Committee Room 2 and via MsTeams
Thursday, June 13, 2024, 7:00 p.m.

- Present: Chair Robin Tunnicliffe; Terry Michell (via Teams); Jenni Michell (via Teams); Larry Sluggett (via Teams); Katie Underwood; Dianne Williamson; and Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary.
- Guests: Noah Brotman, CRD; Shellie MacDonald, Haliburton Farms; Kathleen Zimmerman, Samantha Hammond, CRD (ViaTeams)
- Regrets: Anita Bull, Linda Geggie; Councillors De Vries (Saanich), Paltiel (Central Saanich) and Marshall (North Saanich).
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APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOVED by Dianne Williamson and Seconded by Katie Underwood: “That the Minutes of May 9, 2024 be adopted as circulated.”

CARRIED

At the request of the Chair, members provided a brief summary of farming conditions and highlights of the past month. Yields have been strong for rhubarb, strawberries, beets and carrots. Michell's Farm had a major waterline break early in the morning this week flooding some fields. After 35 years, Sluggett Farms is not doing wholesale marketing with Sobey's this year and is just keeping to a roadside stand.

CHAIR'S REMARKS

- Strawberry crops are early; hay season has been salvaged.
- PAAC has some big issues to address: the Goose Management Strategy; Bio-solids; Farmland Access; understanding the implications of higher density housing; and the governance review.
- She would like PAAC to rekindle its connection with the member municipalities this fall; there have been fewer referrals.
- It was discouraging to see a prominent new development on farmland in Central Saanich at the corner of Mt. Douglas Cross Road and the Pat Bay Highway not be referred to PAAC for comment.
- Plans are underway for a mid-November workshop for municipal councils and staff to raise awareness about illegal fill dumping on farmland.
- The CRD held a Goose Management Strategy meeting yesterday; six participants from various municipalities and the Department of National Defence. We heard about challenges and different approaches to goose management in parks and the Boardwalk in Sidney.
- There is a genuine effort from the CRD to coordinate and execute the Management Plan; however, only 138 nests were added – just over 600 eggs.
- GOOSE has been contracted to do the moult harvest, together with First Nations.
- Drone surveys during moulting season are planned. Training sessions are being offered June 17 and 20 on how to count and record sites on a crowd sourced map.
- She talked to Jody Watson about the next steps, noting that the CRD has assumed a coordination role and leaving the addling and moult harvesting to various municipalities. Jody noted the budget is inadequate.
- The Chair noted a single coordinated effort across the region is the best way to control the geese.

TREASURER'S REPORT – Jenni Michell

- GIC balance is \$17,300; Chequing Account balance is \$957.
- When the GIC matures in August, we have to repay Saanich the \$5000 advanced to us to pay GOOSE.

COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE REMARKS – No representatives were present

SPEAKER'S BUREAU: No speakers scheduled

CORRESPONDENCE: None

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: New and Ongoing

Issues with Local Compost:

- Katie noted that she used an organic, off-farm (but local) compost this spring which resulted in spotty seed germination. She used a small amount mixed with the seed starter mix.
- Other growers using the same compost have had similar results.
- With the lack of dairy farms it is hard to get good compost and manure.
- Noted that the product can be tested but it is cost-prohibitive. The product cost \$660 for 10 yards; it would be \$750 to test it and what would they be testing for on an organic product?
- Agrologists and others she has contacted have been less than helpful.
- Questioned if the Ministry of Agriculture would be able to have a soil sample tested.
- Everywhere else in Canada soils and composts come with a complete analysis – except BC.

(a) Dumping of Fill on Farmland

A recent article in the Vancouver Sun shed light on the amount of fill being dumped on farmland. <https://vancouversun.com/news/local-news/bc-farmland-illegal-dumping>

An outline for the workshop is proposed as follows:

- Invitees would include:
 - staff and councillors from the four member municipalities – planners, bylaw enforcement officers. Non-member municipalities can be included as well.
 - A regional agrologist and a planner from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food
 - Community Associations throughout the region
 - South Island Farmers' Institute members
 - A representative from the ALC (Avtar Sunder)
- Notetakers would be required.
- Documents to provide and/or create: (a) a model Deposit of Fill Bylaw; (b) Fill Permit checklist; (c) Best Practices document; (d) ALC Soil or Fill use in the ALR schematic.
- Issues to address:
 - Is there an example of an anonymous local property that has been used for illegal fill dumping?
 - Who are the best staff contacts at each of the four PAAC member municipalities?
 - What potential locations are available to hold the workshop?.
 - Date of the Workshop: given the provincial election this fall, suggested mid-November would be a good time (for farmers too).

Discussion ensued, noting the following:

- The week of November 12 was suggested – an afternoon meeting time.
- The secretary will check with Saanich to see if the Chambers is available as that is a good central location. (*Note: use of the Chambers was not possible*)
- Suggested participation not be limited to the four member municipalities as construction and fill dumping is occurring all over the Greater Victoria Region.
- Surrey produced an excellent Deposit of Fill Bylaw and perhaps Surrey Councillor Mike Bose would attend.
- We should make use of GIS systems and maps to determine areas where fill has been deposited (Saanich has such a program and so does the CRD).

Note: This item will be considered at the meeting in September. Planning work will continue over the summer.

(b) CRA Lifetime Capital Exemption for Farmers - Larry Sluggett

- Further to discussions at the April PAAC meeting, Larry re-stated the issue about how a farmer could be on the hook for over \$1 million in capital gains tax if more than 50% of the farm is leased.
- Many farmers are unable to secure succession farming; the next generation do not want to farm.
- Any change in ownership can trigger the capital gains tax.
- Even if a farmer transfers the farm to the next generation and they don't qualify for the capital gains exemption, they will have to sell part of the farm to pay the taxes.
- CRA guidelines are very complicated.
- Larry suggested that the secretary try to arrange for a speaker from the CRA to speak at the next PAAC meeting in September.

Note: This item will be considered at the meeting in September.

(c) Cougars in Metchosin – Robin Tunnicliffe

- The Chair advised that Metchosin Council will be discussing the issue of cougars this week.
- She will report out to PAAC on any decisions.
- 33 kills in total from cougars have been recorded this year to date.

Note: This item will be considered at the meeting in September.

REPORTS FROM KEY SECTOR GROUPS

a) Water Update: Mike Doehnel – not present

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

- Many summer events have been planned.
- Unfortunately Saanich did not financially support the February 2025 Farmer2Farmer workshop. Central and North Saanich provided support.
- SIFI is applying for a Grant in Aid through the Strategic Initiatives group; Cassidy, the Saanich Planner, has been helping with the application.
- In recognition of the fall provincial election, SIFI wants to make agricultural a hot topic and may look into inviting some of the candidates to a SIFI meeting.

c) CRD Agricultural Services

CRD Foodlands Access Program – Noah Brotman

- The Terms of Reference for the Foodlands Access Program have been reviewed.
- It is expected the Terms will be considered at the next Planning and Protective Services meeting in July.
- A letter of support from PAAC would be helpful; this program would be the first established agricultural service in the CRD.
- He will keep PAAC advised on the progress and suggest wording for a support letter.

CRD Goose Management Strategy – Samantha Hammond

- The PAAC Chair is a member of the working group; a meeting was held June 12, 2024.
- Egg addling is wrapping up for the season; auxiliary staff were hired to assist.
- The CRD is working with GOOSE and covered 55 properties.
- The plan is to add more properties in 2025 and we will be talking to property owners.
- There were issues with a few property owners not wishing to participate in the program.
- GOOSE located 422 nests and addled 2,028 eggs – a 20% increase over last year.
- The CRD signed a contract with GOOSE to help First Nations during the moulting season harvest next year using drone technology for the first time. We will be coordinating not only with GOOSE and First Nations but local municipalities as well, hoping to identify “hot spots” for harvesting.
- Next year, the CRD hopes to increase the addling programme; the start was a little slow this year. Geese nest everywhere – from public beaches to private lands, farms, local and regional parks and the islands.
- The CRD will have auxiliary staff to help with the addling, but if municipal staff are working in the parks for example, and come across nesting sites, we would ask that they help with addling.
- This is the first year for the program. The budget is small and the CRD covers a huge area – it is not possible to locate every nest for egg addling – which is why we rely on help from farmers, private property owners, golf course and parks staff, etc. If the CRD is required to take the leading role, we may have to ask for more funding.
- In response to a comment from PAAC that GOOSE has indicated they could take on the service for less funding than the CRD requires. The CRD team has met with GOOSE and their understanding was GOOSE could not provide increased services for the budget that has been set.
- Of course the more people that help to addle the eggs the better.
- If anyone wants to help with the moulting survey or counting nests, let her know.
- It would also be helpful if farmers let us know if they find nesting sites on their property.

d) Vancouver Island Adaptation Group (Climate Change) – Bob Maxwell

- The provincial government added \$80 million to the Water Infrastructure Fund; more funding will be allocated to the interior of BC but there will be some for the Island.
- Some areas on the northern part of the Island have limited water distribution systems – such as the Port Alberni area. With the amount of rain and snow that falls in Port Alberni each year, there should be the capacity to store the water.
- Regarding the Climate Survey he circulated to PAAC members and farmers last month, Max asked each farmer present how they received information about climate change.
- Answers varied from print media, word of mouth, farmers' associations, YouTube videos and podcasts.

Terry and Jenni Michell and Larry Sluggett exited the meeting (due to technology issues).

- The Ministry of Agriculture has initiated a number of new programs but are not doing summary reports to agricultural associations. We don't hear the results of surveys or statistics. He suggested PAAC should request the Ministry produce a video on these new programs. The Chair noted representatives from the Ministry came to her farm to view her hedgerows.
- The South Island produces only 20% to 30% of the produce we eat; most comes from California or Mexico. If we could get young farmers on the land we could increase our production.
- It was agreed that if nothing changes, the future is looking grim, which is why farmers need active support now, and it could start with our local municipalities supporting agriculture.
- Katie noted that SIFI meetings are a good way to pass along information to new farmers; PAAC members – most of whom are long-time farmers – are welcome anytime.

OTHER BUSINESS

a) Vancouver Island AgriService Newsletter – Meghan Halstead

- Link to sign up for the newsletter – published quarterly:
- New link: <https://confirmsubscription.com/h/y/EF5CA661750438AD>

b) Governance Review Update

- There is no official response on the status of the governance review. The issue was discussed, however, at the Central Saanich's Council meeting on June 10th. Council recommended that a survey be completed with a view to transitioning away from PAAC.
- Some PAAC members agreed to get together over the next few days and make a presentation to Central Saanich Council at its next meeting.

Note: This item will be considered at the September meeting.

Upcoming Events / Webinars

- Saanich Fair – August 31 – September 2, 2024

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, September 12, 2024 in Committee Room #2 at the Saanich Municipal Hall.

Robin Tunnicliffe, Chair

I hereby certify these minutes are accurate.

Isobel Hoffmann, Senior Committee Secretary