

PENINSULA AND AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION

Held at Saanich Municipal Hall, Committee Room 2 and via MsTeams

Thursday, November 14, 2024, 7:00 p.m.

Present: Chair Robin Tunnicliffe; Linda Geggie; Terry Michell; Larry Sluggett; Katie Underwood; Dianne Williamson; and Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary.

Guests: Noah Brotman, CRD; Megan Halstead, Regional Agrologist (via Teams); Cassidy Daskalchuck, Saanich Planner; Kathleen Zimmerman; Bob Maxwell;

Regrets: Councillors De Vries (Saanich), Marshall (N. Saanich) and Paltiel (C. Saanich), Jenni Michell.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOVED by Terry Michell and Seconded by Katie Underwood: "That the Minutes of October 10, 2024 be adopted as circulated."

CARRIED

CHAIR'S REMARKS – Robin Tunnicliffe

- PAAC should be really proud of what we accomplished, hosting a very successful workshop on Illegal Fill Dumping on Farmland in the CRD. (see details below).
- She has been in contact with both Central and North Saanich regarding the Governance Review and administrative support for PAAC going forward.
- Central Saanich has advised that PAAC may start a candidate selection process for new members. (See more discussion below under Governance Review)
- With the change leadership in the US, it is entirely possible that there will be higher food prices due to import taxes. Most of our produce comes from the US. Also, if the migrants are deported as promised, there will be no one to grow the food which will cripple production. She suggested PAAC consider some press around this pending crisis.

COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE REMARKS – no Councillors Present

TREASURER'S REPORT – Jenni Michell – Not present

SPEAKER'S BUREAU:

- **Davin Contois, Central Saanich Planner, Re Proposed Farm Guidelines**

A copy of the OCP Amendment Bylaw 2217 regarding Farm Protection Guidelines, together with draft recommendations and comments from PAAC regarding Appendix H - Farm Protection Guidelines was circulated.

Mr. Contois advised that Council has given first and second readings to the bylaw; ALC regulations and Ministry guidelines have been met. The draft bylaw will be circulated to the Ministry for review after the November 21 Open House. Decisions on Farm Guidelines will be delegated to staff for a decision going forward. The bylaw has been under discussion since 2022 and comments from PAAC were previously received.

A few sections were discussed as follows:

Section 3 - Exemptions

- The Local Government Act gives municipalities power to create development permit areas for the protection of farmland; exemptions are noted in Section 3 of the bylaw. The intent is to keep residential buildings in one area rather than spread out over the property.
- Depending on the site, it may make more sense to locate a dwelling at the front of the property; under the new bylaw a zoning amendment would not be required.
- **Re Section 3.4**, PAAC recommends that the Farm Protection Guidelines should not exempt the conversion of existing buildings from the farm residential footprint.
- Agreed locating accessory buildings closer to driveways would be acceptable.

Section 5 – Protect Soils

- Section 5.2 states new development should avoid placement in locations with the highest agricultural soil capability, which makes sense.
- PAAC recommended that **Section 5.2.3** be deleted as the previous section (5.2.2) requires a professional agrologist prepare an assessment report and this would provide the rationale for determining the highest agricultural capability.
- **Section 5.2.4** PAAC recommends not siting a new dwelling in an area with “previous land disturbance”, and also the guidelines should apply not only to farmers but owners of ALR lands as well. Illegal fill dumping sites should be listed as non-qualifying sites.
- PAAC questioned whether staff have the professional training to make assessments; Mr. Contois explained there are professional biologists and arborists on staff, and also we will have an agrologist's report.
- The siting of greenhouses and barns in areas with poor soil quality would not affect the prime farmland soil areas.

Section 6 – Cluster Development and Residential Use

- **Section 6.1** (3 specific points):
- to avoid the fragmentation of ALR land and all residential uses, PAAC questioned if the definition of the farm residential footprint should be expanded to include septic systems and water systems (as per Farm Home Plate definitions from the District of Kent.)
- referring to a total residential footprint of 3,000m² or less, PAAC suggested a basic maximum footprint of 2,000m², noting 1,000m² can be added for an additional dwelling unit, which aligns with the Ministry's guidelines. These limits are similar to Saanich's regulations.
- PAAC recommends adding a specific requirement for setbacks to a frontage road and this would be stronger than the proposed wording of a “general” guideline. Where an owner cannot meet the maximum setback due to topography, a Development Variance Permit can be applied.

General comments noted:

- The more restrictions placed on ALR lands the less accessible it is to farmers.
- Re Central Saanich staff being able to make decisions rather than at a public hearing, the Saanich Planner noted that there could be a lot of “grey” areas that would be better handled through the Zoning Bylaw rather than at the discretion of staff. Not all staff members have an agricultural background. The Planner will share Saanich's guidelines with Central Saanich.
- Referring to section 6.1, the use of some of the bird scare tactics (eg cannons) could be problematic depending on the siting of residential dwellings.

- Rules for burning also require larger setbacks from residential buildings which is why clustering the buildings is appropriate.

PAAC thanked Mr. Contois and appreciated the opportunity for PAAC to provide comments.

CORRESPONDENCE: None

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: New and Ongoing

a) Dumping Fill on Farmland Workshop Review **– Wednesday, November 13, 2024, Saanich Fairgrounds**

Some comments received about the workshop:

- *"I learned more today that I have in 3 years at the CRD."*
- *Thank you so much, we never get a chance to network with other bylaw officers. I had so many great conversations and made so many connections. You should do this again next year."*
- There was over 65 attendees, from the lower Island, Cowichan Valley, and the mainland.
- Unfortunately only a couple of councillors attended.
- Most municipalities were represented by planning and / or bylaw enforcement staff.
- The speakers, all from the mainland, were well received. Kathleen Zimmerman filled in for Jenny Eastman of the CRD who was unable to attend.
- Lunch was well received and the amount of food was just right.
- Terry and Jenni Michel donated fresh farm produce and a gift certificate to Harvest Road food truck for door prizes.
- Big thank you to PAAC members who help to organize the event: Robin Tunnicliffe (who also donated all the top notch produce for the vegetarian chili), Linda Geggie, Kathleen Zimmerman, and Isobel Hoffmann.
- With the help of Megan Halstead we were able to secure a \$1500 grant from the Knowledge Transfer Program through the Ministry of Agriculture and Food.
- The workshop was free to all attending. Total costs were \$3,828 as follows:

• Planning Inst. Of BC (Course accreditation fee)	\$	32.76
• Victoria Party Rentals (dishes)	\$	583.64
• N & S Saanich Ag Society (room rental – no discount)	\$	2,359.75
• Village Green Event Rentals (Audio/Visual)	\$	250.10
• Ferry costs for speakers	\$	300.95
• Food	\$	300.00
- It was disappointing that we didn't get a discount for the room rental as this was an agricultural event and was the highest cost of the event. Had we asked Central Saanich to book the space we may have been able to get a reduced rate.
- During the breakout sessions in the afternoon to discuss four specific questions, notes were taken by one person in each group. A comprehensive document will be prepared using the notes as well info from the speakers' presentations, and circulated to all attendees. It is hoped to extract some nuggets of information which can be discussed at council meetings or sent to the media.
- The media was advised about the workshop; a reporter from Country Life attended.

Other comments:

- Richmond has a “dream team” with a dedicated soil officer and a planner; every 3 months they do a bylaw review and send comments to Council as a “housekeeping” measure. A few words may be changed now and then, and annually there is a “what have we learned” workshop to consider if changes need to be made.
- They also have a schedule of fines if rules are not followed: \$500 for the first week and if no action is taken it changes to \$500 a day...and so on...until a lien put on the property.
- If another workshop is considered next year, the following changes should be made:
 - This was a staff development opportunity; perhaps there should be a small attendance fee to offset the costs.
 - We would also get Central Saanich to book the rooms at the Fairgrounds at a discount rate. Perhaps the CRD should be asked to contribute to the cost.
- Richmond seems to have everything in hand; questioned if they would be willing to share their documents.
- Noted having strong regulations is one thing, but there has to be capacity to enforce them, and that would not be insignificant.
- Here, every municipality has different rules including enforcement and fines.
- We need standard policies and a standard, model bylaw across the CRD so no one municipality is the weakest link.
- At the initial permit stage, consider standard requirements that confirm the specific address where the fill is going, how much fill and where it came from.
- Municipalities likely have a list (a 5-year plan?) of different sites where fill can be taken – for example the gravel pit at Royal Bay and the new overpass at Keating. This would be a better option than using farmland.
- Rules and regulations need to be fair and consistent.
- Too much fill is being trucked up-Island.

Action: **Review the notes from the workshop when complete, share with the CRD and municipalities within the Region and up-Island. Ensure there is follow up.**

b) Issues with Local Compost & Testing: Katie Underwood

- There was a recent article in the Country Life Magazine regarding poor quality compost.
- Katie stated she has been unable to get a response from the producers.
- Because the compost resulted in poor germination and lower crop yields she made a surplus of \$800 last year.

c) Governance Review

i) PAAC Review of Current TOR

- PAAC reviewed the TOR and made various amendments.
- It was questioned whether the reference to the 1987 Agricultural Strategy, which was the basis of the formation of PAAC, is still relevant. The Goals & Purpose in the TOR is taken directly from the Strategy.

ii) Update on Central Saanich Governance Review

- Still waiting on a copy of the draft TOR review from Central Saanich

iii) Letter from SIFI requesting voting representative on PAAC

- A letter dated November 3, 2024 was received from SIFI requesting that the Terms of Reference include a representative, a producer member of the Institute, to sit as part of PAAC. This change would ensure accurate reporting on our activities and the perspective and concerns of a broad range of growers.
- Discussion ensued, noting that any member of SIFI who is a farmer or producer can apply to sit on PAAC. If we appointed SIFI as a member we would have to look at other farm organizations such as DFMA.
- Katie is a PAAC member and a member of SIFI and Shellie McDonald, also a SIFI member, regularly attends PAAC meetings.

REPORTS FROM KEY SECTOR GROUPS

a) Water Update: Mike Doehnel – Not present

b) South Island Farmers' Institute Update – Katie Underwood & Shellie MacDonald
- No report

c) CRD AGRICULTURAL SERVICES

• **CRD Foodlands Access Program** – Noah Brotman – nothing to report

• **CRD Goose Management Strategy**

- An email from Jody Watson was read by Noah Brotman, indicating that another survey would be completed shortly.
- PAAC was adamant that no more surveys be done – action is what is needed. We know what the problem is, and where the geese are located; we don't need more surveys to confirm the high numbers.
- Parksville/Nanaimo has successfully dealt with the goose problem in that area almost eradicating the geese – with the help of GOOSE.
- The Chair stated at the October 16 CRD Board meeting she was given two minutes to speak, even though she has registered as a speaker.
- A copy of the report to the Environmental Services Committee presented to the Board on October 16, 2024 was circulated, with a recommendation that staff be directed to develop increased service levels for consideration in the 2026 service planning process.
- The Board's decision not to increase the budget was disappointing and shows a complete lack of understanding. Apparently there was not a seconder to the motion.
- GOOSE has had more success with adding than the CRD.
- Terry Michell advised that Lana Popham came to see him and they discussed geese and flooding. Nothing seems to have changed in years – his cabbages were damaged recently and he lost over \$50,000 in two nights. Farmers can get insurance but it doesn't cover damages from wildlife – unlike the Prairies, which have coverage.
- PAAC should reach out to Graeme Fowler for some specific details about the Parksville/Nanaimo operation.

MOTION: Moved by Linda Geggie and Seconded by Terry Michell: “That PAAC write a letter to the CRD Environmental Services Committee expressing disappointment about the lack of support for the Goose Management Strategy; reference the recent success in controlling the goose population in the Parksville / Nanaimo area, and question why the same tactics are not available to the lower Island areas.”

CARRIED

d) Vancouver Island Adaptation Group (Climate Change) – Bob Maxwell – No comment

e) Vancouver Island AgriService Newsletter – Meghan Halstead

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

Megan stated:

- the Ministry is waiting for the official appointment of a new Minister.
- The next newsletter will be in December.
- She will be helping with the Farmer2Farmer Workshop in January.

f) CR-Fair – Linda Geggie

- The monthly newsletter has been circulated to members noting several workshops.

Upcoming Events / Webinars

- PAAC Christmas Gathering – Thursday, December 5, 2024
- Farmer2Farmer – Saanich Fairgrounds – January 20 – 24, 2025

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:35 pm.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, January 9, 2025**; date could be subject to change; location undetermined at this time pending final decision on the Terms of Reference.

Robin Tunnicliffe, Chair

I hereby certify these minutes are accurate.

Isobel Hoffmann, Senior Committee Secretary