

**PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION MEETING  
COMMITTEE ROOM #2 – SAANICH MUNICIPAL HALL  
THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 14, 2023 7:00 PM**

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In attendance: Robin Tunnicliffe in the Chair; Linda Geggie; Katie Underwood; Dianne Williamson; Anita Bull; Councillor Nial Paltiel, Central Saanich; and Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary.

Guests: Megan Halstead, Regional Agrologist (By ZOOM); Cassidy Daskalchuck, Saanich Planning; Noah Brotman, CRD; Michael Doehnel; Shellie MacDonald; Barry McLean and Kathleen Zimmerman.

Regrets: Terry Michell; Jenni Michell; Larry Sluggett

Minutes: The Minutes of April 13, May 11, and June 8, 2023 Minutes were adopted as circulated.

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Due to a communication error, it was discovered that potential new members Kathleen Zimmerman and Barry MacLean had not yet been officially appointed by Central Saanich as they wish to review the current Terms of Reference and appointment procedures. Saanich, North Saanich and Metchosin have approved the appointments. The Chair and Secretary will discuss with Central Saanich staff and Council to try and resolve the situation. As PAAC meetings are open to anyone who wishes to attend, Kathleen and Barry were permitted to stay, but asked to take a seat away from the table at this time.

**TREASURER'S REPORT - Jenni Michell – not present**

- Isobel reported there has been little change in the balance of the Island Savings Accounts.
- Invoices for the Farm Tour in June have been processed through the Saanich account.
- Our GIC in the amount of \$17,005 has been rolled over for another year and we have \$1,586 in the chequing account.

**SPEAKER'S BUREAU – Noah Brotman, CRD Land Access Programme**

Noah stated:

- It has been decided that Bear Hill Farm would be used for the first Land Access Programme.
- Applications will be sent out next week to see who is interested in participating.
- There has already been some interest, but no formal responses yet.
- The key issue at this stage is getting people to submit requests over the next few months; the CRD will work with the applicants to refine the programme proposal.
- We don't want to be too prescriptive; it is better to leave it up to the applicants to come up with a plan.
- Eventually the CRD will establish the Land Access Programme as a service and issue an RFP (request for proposal).
- An agrologist will be retained, soils and ground water tested, etc. to gather as much base information as possible to obtain a good profile of the land before any programmes are initiated.
- It is expected there will be some soil remediation and infrastructure investments.

- This work should be completed by the end of the year.
- The CRD is open to all ideas but as this is just a five year commitment at this time, he doesn't know if a longer term initiative, such as planting an orchard, is a good idea.
- The five year term is more from a real estate perspective rather than a farming perspective.
- Nothing has happened on the Bear Hill site for over 8 years so any production is a bonus.
- It will not necessarily be “new” farmers on small size lots; but there could be up to 3 farmers on the 3.5 acre site. Nothing has been decided to date.
- This concept plan – which may not be fully operational for another two or three years – is to see if the programme is viable. If it is, then the long-term plan will be to look for more land access.
- The proposed programme will be carefully worded – we don't want to be too restrictive.
- He will be giving a presentation on the Land Access Programme to the Water Board.
- We could benefit from receiving ideas and comments from PAAC and the Farmers' Institutes.

General discussion noted the following:

- Haliburton Farms has a two to four year lease programme, then you are out.
- Unsure at this time how Sandown will operate.
- We probably need something longer-term than five years with more security for the farmer.

## **CORRESPONDENCE:**

### a) 3983 Holland Avenue – Saanich Referral for Farm Worker Accommodations

Cassidy Daskalchuck, Saanich Planning, stated:

- More information was distributed to PAAC on the Holland Avenue Farm Worker Accommodations application, which is the first application since the new guidelines have been adopted.
- The application was submitted a few months ago and was not considered at that time because the applicant had not provided enough information.
- Staff had recommended an agrologist's report be completed; the applicant has stated he cannot find anyone to do the work and it is also expensive. He has asked that the application proceed without the report.
- While an agrologist's report is not a requirement, it is preferred.
- The plan submitted proposes to convert an old farmhouse on the property into temporary accommodations.
- In answer to a comment that the application did not meet the definition of “temporary farm worker housing” as the building is occupied by two people year round, Cassidy stated Saanich contacted the ALC who advised that there can be extenuating circumstances if it is a benefit to the farm.
- Temporary Use Permits – which would apply to FWH – are valid for 3 years, can be renewed one time and also are not usually considered on property less than 4 ha unless there are extenuating circumstances.
- The Policy states: “The minimum size of the farm operation on which the TFWH can be located is 4 ha. Consideration may be given to smaller farms in limited circumstances, if the need for farm worker accommodation, as well as an overall net benefit for farming is demonstrated.”

Discussion ensued and the following comments were noted:

- It seems the accommodations are not for temporary use but rather as a year-round tenant which does not meet the definition of temporary farm worker accommodations.
- The applicant does not present a good business case to support the application.
- The 1.2 acre property is not in the ALR and does not seem very active as a farm.
- Using the Saanich GIS mapping system, the property has rocky outcrops and you can't see one cherry tree – let alone the claimed 61 trees.
- Farm worker housing should support the farm: this application supports the property owner.
- The required threshold for FWH has not been met to justify approval.
- There are strict guidelines for housing temporary foreign workers and the accommodations are inspected to ensure they meet the guidelines.

Meghan Halstead stated:

- She has spoken to Saanich Planning about this application. According to Ministry guidelines, in order to qualify for Farm Worker Housing you have to provide a business case; there are many hoops to jump through. This particular application does not meet the guidelines and it is not temporary.

PAAC discussion continued:

- We have to be consistent as we move forward as there will be more applications. We are creating a precedent.
- This is the first one it is important to ensure it adheres to the approved policy, that the temporary accommodation benefits the farm and perhaps assists young farmers trying to access land in today's market.
- Applications, however, should always be considered on a case by case basis.
- How can we guarantee that accommodations would be used for temporary farm workers?
- It seems a lot of expense to renovate the existing 2<sup>nd</sup> dwelling just for two people.

MOTION: “That PAAC does not support the current submission for temporary farm worker housing at 3983 Holland Avenue because there has been no demonstrated business case to indicate that the land will be used for food production, the property is under the required 4 ha, and the workers are not temporary but rather year-round tenants.”

CARRIED

## **LATE ITEM:**

### **Request for PAAC support for Grant to Support Nature-based Enhancement Activities – Linda Geggie**

Linda stated:

- This is a new nature-based initiative from the Victoria Foundation which could benefit farmers by providing small grants for projects such as supporting pollinators, hedgerows and other plantings. Part of the programme is connecting farmers to additional resources to ensure success of the project.

- A charitable host is needed and she is not sure who would fulfill that role of distributing funds. She thought that the newly formed South Island Farmers' Institute may be interested – if they are a charitable organization.

Meghan Halstead stated;

- Ministry grant programmes allow farmers' institutes to participate; it depends on the criteria that applies to the grant application process.
- She stated the Ministry would be willing to make application for the funding.

Linda advised:

- CR-Fair can apply for the grants but she suggested a letter of support from PAAC would be beneficial.

*NOTE: after the meeting Linda confirmed that a letter of support is not required in order to apply for funding through this programme.*

## **AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: CURRENT**

### **a) Water update – Mike Doehnel**

- A new Chair has been appointed to the Water Advisory Commission and also a new member was appointed to the Saanich Peninsula Waste Water Commission.

Kathleen Zimmerman, member of the Water Advisory Commission, stated:

- The CRD hired a consultant to look at the existing agriculture water rate.
- Reports viewed at the last WAC meeting noted the current value of what the CRD pays for water is equal to approximately \$10 per household – well below the agricultural rate.
- The CRD recommended that no changes be made to the agricultural water rates at this time.

### **b) Spring Farm Tour 2023 – Linda Geggie (Robin and Isobel)**

- Isobel provided a review of the June farm tour to three Metchosin farms (Sea Bluff, Bilston Creek Lavender Farm and Still Meadow Farm), with bus pickups at Michells and Saanich Municipal Hall.
- Although all participants enjoyed the tour and had mostly positive things to say, the turnout was very disappointing.
- A few last minute cancellations – which are always expected – reduced the number of attendees to under 20. We had thought with new councillors being elected in each municipality this year the turnout would have been better.
- Three notices were sent promoting the tour: A save the date in the early spring; the official notice at the beginning of May, and a reminder a week prior to the event. People could sign up through Eventbrite, email, or phone to register.
- Invites were extended to Councillors and staff of the sponsoring municipalities, PAAC members, the CRD and the Water Board.

- The only major complaint was difficulty hearing the speakers on the bus as it was very noisy – and we had great speakers: Linda Geggie as MC, Michael Doehnel (Water), Shellie MacDonald (small scale farming initiatives) and Jody Watson, CRD (Goose Management Programme).
- With the cost of the bus (almost \$700), the lunch, refreshments at Bilston Creek Lavender Farm, and a few misc. expenses, the tour was over \$60 per person.

Discussion ensued on the possible reasons for the low turnout:

- Weather? Saturdays can be busy family days? Should kids be included? Location? Lack of interest? Would a week day be better? Reach out to other stakeholders and interest groups?
- Would a presentation to the Councils help to promote the importance of food security and the hard work of our local farmers?
- It was a lot of time and effort by many people to organize the tour. Perhaps it has run its course? The first few tours had a full bus with 40+ people.
- Perhaps we need our Council reps to promote the tour with their fellow councillors?
- Metchosin and Saanich were the only municipalities represented.

It was agreed to add the Farm Tour to the January agenda, with a possible PAAC delegation to visit the sponsoring councils - timed with the release of the 2023 Annual Report. Although noted that the tours are generally held every four years to coincide with municipal elections.

**c) South Island Farmers' Institute – Katie Underwood**

Katie stated:

- Things are progressing very well. We have total of 46 members. She and Shellie have been attending local farmers' markets, signing up new members.
- A few events have been scheduled, including a seed saving workshop at Sea Bluff Farm on September 24, 2023 from 10 am to 3 pm., with a a Potluck, partnering with Farm Folk – City Folk.
- She is working on a cover-crop programme – SPEC (Society for Promoting Environmental Conversations). Shellie has been helping with the organizing, working with local Feed stores. Seventeen farms have signed up; distribution on Sunday September 17. One of the requirements for signing up for the cover crop programme is to provide feedback on whether it has been a success or not, or if there have been any notable changes. The programme is free for participants.
- The Farmers' Institute has applied for funding from the province's Knowledge and Technology Transfer Programme.
- We will be participating in the Farmer2Farmer in February, which will showcase what is happening on the south Island and provides good networking opportunities.
- Linda stated has the full history of F2F; the files are all digital and she can pass the information along the the Farmers' Institute.
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**d) CRD GOOSE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME – No update available**

## OTHER BUSINESS

a) **Vancouver Island Agriculture Adaptation Group – Bob Maxwell** – not present

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

- Link to sign up: [https://agriservicebc.campayn.com/contact\\_list\\_form/signup/110236](https://agriservicebc.campayn.com/contact_list_form/signup/110236)

Megan provided updates on Ministry initiatives as follows:

- The official opening for the Esquimalt Food Hub and processing centre (now called Kitchen Connect) on Viewfield Road in Esquimalt is scheduled for October 6, 2023. A soft opening was held in September.
- The Knowledge and Technology Transfer Programme (KTTP) is now officially open.
- A Facebook Page has been setup for AgriService-BC; see <https://www.facebook.com/people/AgriService-BC/100094092653516/>
- A new Farm Workers' Policy will be released in the fall; the Ministry will be hosting a workshop.
- We also have some workshops planned on the Island for drought and water management for livestock producers - still to be finalized.
- The new Minister of Agriculture, Pam Alexis, is settling in well and her priorities are in line with current practices.
- The FeedBC provincial food programme is now expanding to serve school grades K to 12, already at work bringing BC made products into menus for post-secondary institutions, hospitals and other public institutions.
- A bylaw standard for seasonal agricultural worker housing is being developed; she will find out more information on this. Guidelines are in place: [BC-TFW-Housing-Inspections-Guidelines-Dec-2016.pdf \(walicanada.ca\)](#)

## UPCOMING EVENTS/WEBINARS

- CRD Clean Farms Event at Hartland Landfill, Wednesday October 4, 9:00 am – 4:00 pm

**NEXT MEETING:** The next PAAC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, October 12 , 2023 at 7:00 pm at the Saanich Municipal Hall, Committee Room No. 2

**NOTE** the November meeting has been changed from November 9<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup>.

**ADJOURNMENT:** The meeting adjourned at 8:55 pm

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Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary