



**MINUTES OF THE
PENINSULA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
Committee Room No. 2, Saanich Municipal Hall
THURSDAY, MARCH 13, 2014 AT 7:30 PM**

Present: Mike Romaine in the Chair; Bernadette Greene; Bev Marley; Bob Maxwell; Terry Michell; Diane Williamson; Councillors Stock (N.Saanich), Derman (Saanich), Cormier (C.Saanich). Also present was Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Clerk.

Guests: Jacklyn Hoole and Larry Sluggett

Regrets: Councillor Loveless; Linda Geggie; John Buchanan; Niki Tate-Stratton; Ryan Vantreight.

Minutes: A change was made to page 7 of the minutes under Licensed Medical Marijuana, last bullet, changing "exporters" to "inspectors". **Moved by Bernadette Greene and Seconded by Bev Marley: "That the Minutes of February 13, 2014 be adopted as amended."**

Carried

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Mike Romaine advised he arranged for his signature to be on the bank accounts at Island Savings. The Treasurer stated there were no changes to the accounts from last month.

SPEAKERS' BUREAU:

Members discussed various topics and speakers to come to future PAC meetings, as follows:

- Stacy Taves, Level Ground Trading Co. He spoke at the recent Farmer2Farmer Workshop.
- Vic Derman offered to do a presentation on Climate Change at the May meeting; he made this presentation at the recent AVICC conference.
- Someone to speak about marketing and farm co-operatives would be helpful. Perhaps the owner of the Red Barn Market could speak to this issue (Mike Romaine offered to check). Farmers in the Courtenay area have formed a co-op making it easier for farmers to market their products, and rather than being in competition with each other, they work together.
- Agri-Tourism would be an interesting topic, particularly as Central Saanich just introduced Temporary Use Permits which can be applied to farmland. Brent Warner was suggested as a possible expert on this topic.
- A member from the Island Chef's Collaborative.
- Reed canary grass in our streams and waterways causes major drainage issues; would be helpful to have an expert in this area speak about how to manage and control the invasive plant.
- Suggested some members of the 4-H group be invited to speak at a meeting, which could lead in to discussions about eating healthy with local foods..."You are Where You Eat".

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The revised Terms of Reference was sent to the sponsoring municipalities after the last meeting and has now been scheduled at the North Saanich, Central Saanich and Sidney Council meetings next

week. PAC members Mike Romaine, Bob Maxwell and Ryan Vantreight will each attend a meeting to answer questions if required.

CORRESPONDENCE

- Letters from sponsoring municipalities endorsing the appointment of Bernadette Greene as a member of PAC for a 3-year term.

MUNICIPAL STRATEGIC PLANS

Further to discussions at the last meeting, the Chair and Councillor Cormier prepared a draft document (circulated to members), to eventually be sent to the sponsoring municipalities, indicating that PAC is willing to assist in any way when the municipalities are preparing their Strategic and Budgeting plans. Noted that PAC could also assist with the development of short-term priorities for areas that intersect with PAC's mandate.

The Chair stated he does not want to send this concept to the Municipalities until the Terms of Reference have been endorsed.

A change was suggested to the first sentence: “In follow-up to the recent work PAC has undertaken with the **Terms of Reference** to clarify its role....”

Councillor Cormier noted that the Strategic Plan document from 1997 submitted with PAC's Annual Report is on the Council agenda for discussion. The issues and concerns identified in 1997 are still relevant today and it would be interesting to hear how current trends have had an impact on the farm community. It would be helpful to hear what PAC sees as regional agricultural issues today, and identify where help is needed.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – Current

- **Goose Management Strategy (Bev Marley, Rob Kline)**
 - No further updates at this time. Bev was unable to attend the last meeting.
- **Deer Management Strategy (Ryan Vantreight)** - not present
- **CRD Food Systems Strategy (Linda Geggie)** – not present
- **ALC/ALR Core Review (Linda Geggie)** - not present
- **Farmland Trust** – report from Saanich circulated

Councillor Derman stated:

- The idea of a Farmland Trust was discussed by Saanich Council, further to a report from Councillor Dean Murdock.
- It was well received and sent back to staff to develop a report.
- He suggested that Council send the staff report to this commission for comment.

Larry Sluggett, a farmer in Central Saanich, stated:

- He is a member of the Central Saanich Agricultural Advisory Committee and they have discussed the idea of a farmland trust.
- There was a lot of interest, particularly with properties such as Sandown and Panama Flats.
- There is a concern that this initiative has the potential to damage the current farm community. For instance: land and infrastructure being made available for “free” or at taxed-subsidized rates to potential farmers would subsequently affect the pricing and would be unfair to existing farmers who have bought their farmland at market rates.
- He requested that the local agricultural advisory committees and PAC take a stance on this issue.

It was agreed this this the role of PAC to bring forward concerns from farmers to the Councils.

Councillor Derman stated:

- On the surface, the concept of having a farmland trust to protect our agricultural land and making it available to young farmers is a good idea.
- However, the report gave no indication of what this would look like and how it would be implemented – which is why it was sent to staff for research and options, and will later be sent to this commission before it is considered again by Council.
- The report was well-intended, but three years ago he and Councillor Cubberley drafted a report about looking into an agricultural strategy, to identify the problems facing farmers and to look at options for solutions. It was referred to staff, but he is still waiting for the report.

Discussion noted the following:

- Agreed it is a good idea to get young farmers interested and involved.
- However, there are many serious issues that commercial farmers have faced for years that have yet to be properly addressed by local and provincial governments – such as drainage and crop loss due to wildlife (deer and geese).
- The agricultural industry is in decline; something like this could exacerbate it if not implemented in the right manner.
- The average farmer is now 57 years old; we need younger farmers, but not to the detriment of existing farmers.
- There are only two commercial chicken farmers left on the Island now and with no processing plants on the island, it cost one farmer \$6,000 in ferry costs to get the chickens to the mainland for processing.
- There are also only two major dairy farms on the Island.
- If there is to be a farmland trust, municipalities would have to consider taxes and access to farmland for those people who own their own properties. Municipalities could lose money.
- It is good that there is public interest and it is easy for the public to understand the concept of a farmland trust. What they don't understand are the obstacles.
- Central Saanich as part of its strategic plan has reviewed a letter to the CRD about the Regional Sustainability process, including issues such as infrastructure and land trusts.***
- Farmland trusts could be owned by the public and leased to young farmers at market rates. However, it is also important to get young farmers and established farmers on a strong economic footing.
- Because something like a land trust would easily be supported by the general public and because it sounds like a good idea, we need to be cautious.
- It has the potential to take on a life of its own and there will be no thought to infrastructure, machinery, irrigation, expertise, etc.
- Leasing land to young farmers is one thing, but we have to remember that established farmers have mortgages. Land must be leased at market rates or it will damage the local farm community.

- When Saanich staff is preparing the report, it would be valuable to get input from established farmers.
- Noted that some farmers have inherited the farms, so they are not paying “market price”. On the other hand, it was noted farms that have been in the family for generations survive due to hard work and it would not be fair to discredit those farmers who have inherited their farm.
- New farmers today cannot afford to purchase agricultural land and they still have to pay taxes, fuel and transportation costs as other farmers do.
- New farmers would not be “getting” the land – they would just be leasing. They could also lease from other farmers.
- Established farmers who bought their land and pay a mortgage, or have inherited the land, have an asset which could be sold.
- It costs approximately \$300,000 for .5 acres of agricultural land.
- With respect to Madrona Farm, it is understood that it was purchased through the Land Conservancy and the community pitched in.
- It is important to ensure that exploring the concept of a farmland trust does not take away from the present issues severely affecting farmers – such as drainage, composting, water, and transportation.
- There is nothing wrong with exploring the issue of a farmland trust but the politicians should be aware of the issues and the potential impact on established farmers.

Suggested that PAC could take a pro-active approach and prepare a report outlining the issues facing farmers, suggesting solutions, and requesting Councils take a broad-strategy approach. Noted this dovetails into the regional sustainability strategy, which explores extension of services.

Councillor Derman stated that the CRD and the regional growth strategy are good, but in terms of agriculture, there is no power. The CRD has a role but they cannot put things in place until municipalities grant authority.

Summary & Action:

It was agreed that at the next meeting, the Commission consider the following:

- The present state of agriculture
- The issues farmers face
- The potential solutions to address these issues
- A new sub-committee be formed to take the lead on this topic (*suggested possible members include Dianne Williamson, Niki Tate-Stratton and Bernadette Greene*) and prepare a report to be submitted to the municipalities, defining the problems and issues to be considered if forming a farmland trust to ensure that there is a level playing field.
- It was agreed there is enough expertise around the table to come up with a list of issues.
- Councillor Derman suggested that rather than PAC looking for solutions, the report outlining the issues be sent to staff and they can use their knowledge and resources to determine solutions.

CARRY for brainstorming session at the next meeting

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – NEW

Licensing of Medical Marijuana (North Saanich)

Note: this item was originally on the Agenda for this meeting, then removed when the secretary was advised by staff at North Saanich that the issue has been decided by Council and all they needed was an official copy of the February PAC Minutes, where the matter was discussed briefly.

Councillor Stock stated:

- Some North Saanich Councillors would still like to hear PAC's advice on the issue of growing medical marijuana and the new Health Canada programme. Does PAC think the new programme a good idea, and is it based on sound principles, etc.
- Council has prohibited the growing of medical marijuana under the new scheme of the Health Canada programme.
- There are many issues that have not been addressed – such as there only being three inspectors.
- Council would like to hear PAC's advice from a professional farmer's standpoint.
- She understands this is not an easy topic for PAC to discuss; the Health Canada programme would have to be reviewed and analysed, and would be a lot of work.
- It is not that people are against medical marijuana – they just don't want the facility next door to their residence or farm.
- In her opinion, it should be on industrial land because of the high security fencing and lighting measures that are required.
- North Saanich residents were very upset with the proposal.
- It is difficult to determine the type of business licence to be issued.

Councillor Cormier stated:

- She would also appreciate hearing PAC's perspective.
- Central Saanich Council, on the advice of staff who noted this is a permitted use within the ALF, approved a facility.
- She has many concerns about this, such as a hard surface being placed on arable land and the smell that will emanate from the building.

Councillor Derman stated the plan is not well thought out.

- He attended the UBCM session on this topic and it was very hostile.
- As a consequence, it is not clear if under the Right to Farm Act if this is a permitted use.
- If a facility is built on industrial land, it will be taxed at the agricultural rate.
- The use could be banned on industrial land but it probably could not be banned from agricultural land.

The matter was discussed at the North Saanich Agricultural Advisory Committee and Ms. Greene stated it was noted the people who grow the marijuana will be able to make some money at it.

- This is not a proper use of agricultural land and she thinks we are setting ourselves up for foreign ownership.
- Abbotsford has legal business operations and they are now trying to ban them, so there are obviously problems.

Councillor Stock advised that North Saanich Council has to consider the issue within the next six months and this is why we want advice from PAC. The issue is being interpreted in many ways across the country. We could wait and see what other municipalities report through the AVICC or the UBCM, but Council would really like PAC's opinion.

Discussion noted:

- This is not a quiet operation: it could be operating 24/7, with high volumes of truck traffic.
- It could provide a good source of income for farmers.
- It was previously suggested that we could have get experts to speak to the pros and cons of the venture to hear both sides of the argument, or someone from Health Canada, but after the reception that representative received at the UBCM it might not be very beneficial.
- Suggested there may be someone from UVIC, Camosun or Royal Roads in the horticulture programmes who could offer an expert opinion.

Action: Suggested that Councillor Stock and Bernadette Greene will try to arrange for a speaker to attend a PAC meeting.

AGRICULTURAL STRATEGY – Sub-Committee Reports

Water: ((Michael Doehnel)

- Michael has agreed to continue as the agricultural representative on both the Water Advisory Committee and the Saanich Peninsula Waste Water Committee. He will report to PAC when there is a matter concerning agriculture.
- The Commission is grateful that Mike has agreed to continue this valuable service.

Farm Economics (Terry Michell) –nothing to report.

Agricultural Land Base (Mike Romaine) Nothing to report.

Resource Stewardship (Vacant)

The Chair stated we need to appoint someone who has the time to put in more effort into this area.

Councillor Derman advised that Saanich Council recently considered the Panama Flats issue and resolved that the majority of the property be held in the ALR. There were some concerns about one area proposed for ALR as it is an established wetland and it is critical for the migratory birds. Unsure whether this portion should be included in the ALR if it will never be farmed. It is also undecided whether the ALR property would be leased to one farmer, or several.

Noted that Maber Flats will be purchased by the Nature Conservancy of Canada and will be preserved as a migratory bird sanctuary.

Education and Outreach (Linda Geggie) – not present

The Farmer2Farmer workshop held last on March 6 was well attended (200+), with attendees coming from Salt Spring and Duncan as well as locals. The presentations and the food were very good. There were lots of new faces and younger people.

OTHER:

Graham Creek: A letter from the Central Saanich Storm Water Management Group advised that the sediment in Graham Creek was up 500% this year. The cause could be related to a number of things and farmers are trying to find out the root of the problem.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Information has been circulated via email to PAC members on the following events:

- ◆ Saanich Peninsula Healthy Communities “You Are Where You Eat” - March 27, 2014

Councillor Cormier stated there are about 20 seats left for the workshop. She asked members to encourage people they know who would be interested to register soon.

WEBSITE - <http://saanich.ca/living/afs/index.html>

Members were reminded to pass along information they wish to be posted on the site.

Adjournment: On a Motion from Bev Marley, the meeting adjourned at 9:10 pm

Next Meeting: The next PAC meeting will be held on **THURSDAY APRIL 10 2014**, 7:30 pm at the Saanich Municipal Hall, Committee Room No. 2.