



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

Present: Mike Romaine in the Chair; Bernadette Green; Bev Marley; Bob Maxwell; Nikki Tate-Straton; Dianne Williamson; Councillor Stock (Sidney). Also present was Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Clerk.

Guests: Dan Morton, Renuable Resources Ltd., Jane Evans & Cameron Scott, Saanich Planning.
Regrets: Mary Alice Johnson, Tom Henry, Linda Geggie; Ryan Vantreight; Rob Kline; Councillors Derman, Cormier and Loveless.

Minutes: Moved by Diane Williamson and Seconded by Bev Marley: "That the Minutes of October 9, 2014 be adopted, with an amendment to page 2, changing the North Saanich Agricultural Society to the North Saanich Food for the Future Society."

CARRIED

Agenda: The Agenda was approved as distributed.

TREASURER'S REPORT – nothing to report

SPEAKER'S BUREAU: - Dan Morton, Renuable Resources Ltd.

www.grassoline.ca

Mr. Morton stated:

- The company, based in Campbell River, has been in business since 1996 and produces fish compost and liquid fish fertilizers.
- We are in the process of purchasing equipment to produce dry fish meal.
- It is a small, family-run business and we would like to broaden our market.
- The fish comes from fish farms, the Fish and Wildlife Society, and other fish stock year round.
- A cold natural process is used rather than the usual heat process. The cold process relies on the natural bacteria and enzymes in the fish to make the fertilizer.
- We try to use the most natural process possible to retain the highest levels of micro nutrients.
- He acknowledged there are concerns about using fish from fish farms; however, all products have gone through the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and are certified organic.
- The liquid fertilizer takes about 9-12 months to produce, and they have on-site capacity to store 500,000 gallons.
- The fish compost takes about 18 months before it is ready.
- A large amount of the fertilizer is trucked to this area; it is also available in smaller quantities depending on the needs of the farm.
- The product is 2-0-0 and certified organic.
- They have been requested to increase the phosphorus levels by some farms and also produce a 2-3-0 product, also certified organic.
- The fertilizer can be sprayed on fields; the liquid fertilizer is filtered through a fine mesh screen. There have been no issues with the spraying.
- We work with a local shipping company, and can have product delivered to Victoria the next day.

The Chair thanked Mr. Morton for this presentation. Mr. Morton left brochures for information.

BUSINESS ARISING FROM MINUTES – October 9, 2014

◆ Saanich Agricultural Strategy – Terms of Reference

Jane Evans & Cameron Scott, Saanich Planning, were present to elaborate.

Mr. Scott stated:

- Saanich is beginning the process of forming an Agriculture and Security Action Plan.
- On October 6, Council approved the Terms of Reference to establish a task force that would guide the development of the Action Plan and hire a consultant.
- We are at the beginning stages of development and a Request for Proposal (RP) is being prepared for a consultant early next year.
- We want to understand some of the work that has already been done in the region: the CRD is working on the Food Systems Strategy; Central Saanich and North Saanich have also done a lot of work on agricultural strategies.
- Saanich wants to work as closely as possible with these bodies to identify any gaps and move forward with implementation of the Action Plan.
- We will be looking to PAAC as a key advisory source.
- It is estimated the 9-member Task Force, which will have a broad representation, will take about a year to form recommendations. Council of course will have the final say in the matter.
- Discussions are underway with the CRD, whose draft Food Systems Strategy should be ready in the January. This strategy should identify key areas but there could be gaps – issues that are important to Saanich residents.
- The process will be an on-going collaboration; there are definitely benefits in a more regionalized approach for certain issues.
- If there is a commonsense solution and we can work with other municipalities to advance the Plan, this is something we will definitely consider.
- He agreed there are issues that may be best addressed from a regional perspective.
- It is important to make efficient use of everyone's time.
- Central and North Saanich have already done a lot of work in this area, and it would be beneficial to consider their comments.
- In response to a comment about on-going flooding issues in the McHugh Ditch area which borders Saanich and Central Saanich, Mr. Scott advised he is aware of this but not in a detailed way. The Task Force will be preparing an inventory of the issues – and this would be included.

Discussion noted:

- farming crosses borders and when groups and municipalities don't work together it impedes the process. There have been too many studies and not enough action.
- Concern was noted about the process used by municipalities and the CRD when looking at plans and strategies, in that there have been no field visits. Now that sustainability is being introduced – which includes all issues such as geese, deer, water, flooding and drainage – how can these problems be fully understood without seeing the problems first hand. So far it has been “internet farming”.

Mr. Scott agreed that artificial boundaries are not the best for looking at watershed planning issues.

- Anything that has been an issue in the past would be useful for us to know about.
- He agreed that seeing problem situations on site was a good point.

- Once the consultant has been hired and the Task Force established, they will meet with stakeholder groups and identify key issues. PAAC will be involved early in the process.

Glen Meadows Rezoning – comments from Commission

Further to the presentation on the proposal for Glen Meadows Golf Course at the October 9 meeting, members were asked to provide comments which will be submitted to North Saanich. The municipality has asked PAAC for a Motion on the proposal.

Bob Maxwell prepared detailed written comments covering the overall concept, citing various concerns regarding the 30-acre parcel to be developed and the 100-acre parcel to be gifted to North Saanich, touching on soil conditions, crops, the Right to Farm, and the concept of rural farming. These comments will be provided to North Saanich.

Other comments were noted as follows:

One member supported the concept in principle, with a proviso that it will be considered in detail through due process.

- Is this type of thinking worthy of support at this time?
- She generally supports the concept provided there is adequate consultation.
- There are so many concerns, issues and challenges to consider.

One member noted:

- This is a huge parcel of land that has been dormant for a long time.
- It will take a major effort to bring the land back so it can produce.
- The Pendray's bought their farm 45 years ago and it took a lot of hard labour, lots of money, and a great family effort to bring the soils to the condition they are in today.
- Where is the money going to come from to get this land working properly?
- How can the proposed strata corporation tell property owners they cannot have livestock? You can't tell people what they can or cannot farm.
- It is understood that the family wants to make money on the development for their retirement.
- The property could be divided in half – but then they wouldn't get the same value.

Another member had concerns about building homes on ALR land.

- The more we entertain these kind of ideas, the more likely we will have land speculators buying land and driving prices up.
- It is understood the family has a situation where they want to get some money back on their investment, but this (the strata development) will be another piece of farmland we won't get back again. It is a dangerous trend and could set a precedent for the province.
- In this particular situation where 100 acres is being gifted to the municipality – what if the district sells all or part of it?
- PAAC is a voice for agriculture, and she is concerned about how this proposal will affect agriculture.

Another member pointed out that there is currently a lot of farmland for sale – it is not land we need – but farmers.

- Unfortunately there are not many young people who are interested in farming; it is hard to make a living at it.

- Large parcels of land do not sell easily – the 5-acre lots sell faster. If you have a large farm, you need help to run it, and it is hard to find labour.
- The issues farmers' face today are many: such as the nematode problem which requires thorough washing of all farm equipment.
- It is a huge task for the municipality to take on the responsibility of a 100-acre parcel – on top of the Sandown property recently acquired.

Another member highlighted the following guiding principles:

- there is a difference between a concept and implementation: this is a good concept, but implementation is another thing.
- There is a growing urgency for local food security and concerns about ALR land; Society as a whole needs the best possible information to make informed decisions.
- As resources become scarce, we need to consider policies for fish habitats, for example, or a “no net loss” of agricultural land for developments.
- The fact that it is a golf course now does not affect its inherent capabilities.
- To make a more informed decision about this property, we need better maps that relate to the proposed development. The detailed information provided by Saanich about the recent boundary change for property on Beckwith Avenue was cited as an example.
- Maps including details about soil classifications, drainage and flooding and the agricultural capabilities of the land are important tools to have: they should be shown as an overlay on the property, along with the proposed changes.
- Specific concerns for this proposal:
 - impact on drainage, particularly with run-off from the proposed development and preloading
 - loss of agricultural land – is the proposed development in the right place?
 - Net loss of agricultural land by class
 - Mitigation of drainage consequences
- Major concerns about the proposed strata development:
 - A parliamentary committee is looking at the Strata Act right now – with the main issue being enforcement of the Act.
 - How can the sustainability of the land use and common farm property be enforced?
 - Before this goes forward, a detailed legal analysis and interpretation of the strata component is very important.
 - Again, the concept is good but the proposal has to go back to the drawing board – particularly with respect to the strata aspect.
 - Concepts such as the Keating Farm have been very successful. It allows people who cannot afford to buy land the opportunity to farm.
 - This particular concept needs a different approach.

Councillor Stock stated:

- The property has been owned by the same family for many years as a private interest.
- The golf course has always had drainage issues and the soils will probably require mediation.
- Many golfers advise that the course is not well-maintained.
- North Saanich has recently acquired the 83-acre Sandown property, which also needs a great deal of remediation. The intent is to lease this property to young farmers. What will we do with another 100 acres?

- She doesn't know how a strata corporation can tell a farmer what he can or cannot do.
- The heart of the matter is it is a private interest they are trying to resolve by bringing in the community and the Agricultural Land Commission.
- There is more and more pressure for land development; if North Saanich approves this application, it will definitely set a precedent.
- There are so many issues with this proposal, particularly regarding the strata. She agreed a legal assessment is necessary.

Bob Maxwell cited an example in Marin County, Northern California where acres of beautiful ranch land are protected and preserved by the government, who have contributed millions of dollars to ensure it will remain this way. The land title ensures the land will not only remain agricultural but cannot be subdivided any further. See the following links for more information.

<http://www.californiaagriculture.ucanr.org>

<http://www.buzzfeed.com/sandraeallen/21-reasons-marin-county-is-the-most-beautiful-county>

- He suggested with the Glen Meadows proposal, selling the land in five-acre plots, without the strata aspect, would be simpler and easier to sell, and also ensure better protection of the ALR.
- It will be difficult to drain the property as he believes there is ground water discharge.
- Perhaps creating a reservoir should be a consideration.
- The property doesn't have to be farmed – it could be an agricultural park, used for educational purposes, or used for wetlands and reservoirs – which we need more than 100 acres of farmland that requires serious drainage work.

Michael Doehnel, PAC's representative on the Water Advisory Commission (WAC), stated WAC has told the Regional Water Commission's that there is no plan or mapping for water sources on the Peninsula. This would be vital in case of an emergency.

The Chair stated municipalities need to have a common strategy for dealing with this type of issue. We have to tread carefully and there is a lot of work to do before anything should be considered.

The secretary will assemble the comments and prepare a report for North Saanich.

CORRESPONDENCE

Email from Abra Bryne, advisor on the Steering Committee for the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network, advising that CBAN has created an online action letter to be sent to the Minister of Health.
<Http://www.cban.ca/Resources/Topics/GE-Crops-and-Foods-On-the-Market/com>

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – CURRENT

Report from the Chair regarding possible approaches by PAAC to aid in regional coordination of agricultural matters. A copy of the report was circulated to Commission members.

The Chair reviewed his report and noted:

- PAAC has considered many issues over the years, including plans/proposals for subdivision of ALR lands; boundary adjustments within ALR lands; composting; new types of developments on agricultural lands (Medical Marijuana facilities); waste disposal on agricultural lands; up zoning/rezoning of agricultural lands; development form and structures on agricultural lands; GMO's; drainage and irrigation issues; pest management (geese and deer); agricultural development and food strategies; farmland trust and access; education and outreach; and Provincial and Federal policies and programs (changes to the ALR).
- It might be helpful to the municipalities if PAAC provided some "screening guidelines", to apply to all referrals related to subdivision, change of use, rezoning, boundary adjustments, development form and structure that enlarge the foot print on ALR lands.
- There appears to be an increasing demand on PAAC for advice – which reflects the growing pressures on Agricultural lands.
- Many issues that contribute to these pressures and the result has been increasing workloads on all participants at municipal and regional level as well as on voluntary advisory groups such as PAAC.
- Recently PACC had an expanded mandate approved to address regional wide issues and therefore it is appropriate to consider and initiate discussions on possible approaches by PAAC to aid Regional Coordination on Agricultural matters.
- Such guidelines could request such information to be consistent across the region such as:
 - Soil, drainage and wetland analysis
 - Land capabilities
 - Analysis on net loss or gain of ALR
 - Rationale for rezoning
 - Pest management issues (deer/geese)
 - Ecological and environmental values of the site
- He noted if funding were available a consultant or student could be hired to review the many important issues (some noted above) that PAC has considered over the past 16 years and extract information to form the basis for the guidelines.
- The rationale presented by Saanich to support the Beckwith Farms proposal was understandable, with excellent maps, and was well-received; PAAC supported the project.
- When considering the redevelopment of the Roost property in Central Saanich, PAAC provided guidelines for future developments which were well received.
- In addition to general screening guidelines for handling specific development proposals, he offered suggestions for proposals that have a regional impact or need regional coordination, such as medical marijuana facilities, disposal of waste materials and fill, composting facilities, drainage and irrigation issues, and pest management control.

The Chair's report outlined options on how the above suggestions can be implemented. These options include:

1. Have PAAC volunteer commission members begin work on reviewing previous position's by PAAC and develop screening guidelines, to be provided to the Municipalities for review and feed back
2. Develop terms of reference and seek funding from possible sources to hire a consultant to review existing PACC positions on topics identified above for review and adoption.
3. Develop a process and procedure concurrently or in advance requesting the opportunity to meet with Municipalities and Regional government to present PAAC's approach with the desire to develop the above guidelines, principles etc. in collaboration with governments in the Peninsula and Region.

The report was well received by members, and discussion ensued on how to move forward. It is unsure how much a consultant would cost to review and assemble the information. Suggested the municipalities may provide some additional grant monies to assist, or perhaps we would be eligible for a grant under the Strategic Outreach Programme, mentioned by Rob Kline at the October meeting. Or, rather than a consultant, a university student could be hired for a lower cost.

Linda Geggie, not present at the meeting, submitted written comments on the Chair's report, noting that a meeting with CR-Fair, CRD ad hoc working groups on the Food Strategy and representatives from municipal agricultural advisory committees, including the soon to be formed Saanich Food Security Task Force should be arranged to talk about the issues on the table, see where there is overlap and opportunities for coordination. She could help arrange such a meeting for the spring.

MOTION: Moved by Bob Maxwell and Seconded by Bev Marley: "That PAAC endorse the Chair's report "*Possible Approaches by PAAC to aid in Regional Coordination of Agricultural Matters*"; that PAAC pursue the identified options for implementation of the report's suggested actions, and further that the report be referred to the municipalities for comment."

CARRIED

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – CURRENT

- Carry forward to the next meeting

AGRICULTURAL STRATEGY – SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS

a) Water (Michael Doehnel)

Michael Doehnel stated:

- He will prepare a report on water and crops, similar to last year's, to be used in the Annual Report. Terry Michell assists with the crop portion.
- This coming year, the agricultural water subsidy is budgeted for \$1 million and CRD staff have been reviewing this, looking to find a way to reign in the subsidy – but this could open a whole can of worms.
- When it comes to the CRD, people are quick to blame the staff, but it is the politicians who should firmly steer the staff. Retail rates keep increasing; water consumption keeps decreasing and infrastructure costs need to be covered.
- The reason the Regional Water Commission is in so much debt is because of the purchase of the Leach River Watershed; its use, given the reduction in overall usage, is expected to be pushed farther into the future.
- He has several questions which is making it difficult to form his report this year: Is the \$1 million subsidy being used effectively to support farming? Is there merit in the CRD taking a closer look at individual water users?
- The CRD has broken down the ag rates in to two metered categories (AR = agricultural/residential which rebates all usage over 455 m3 at the Ag rate, and AG =

dedicated meter for Ag use only and is fully rebated) North Saanich has a higher ratio of AR to AG usage as there are more smaller farms; 77% of Saanich agricultural water is used in the AG category. There is also many leased areas having only one meter often due to the significant cost of installing a meter. More meters should be encouraged to increase food production.

- If water was more expensive, farmers would buy less and the municipalities could not collect their average 50 cent per m³ markup.
- Agricultural water is expensive but it has been shown that farmers use on average 2% of the total, much less than the 8% that “goes missing”. People forget that farms often have wells, retention ponds, and water licenses
- Looking at the RWSC budget executive summary, the way the agricultural subsidy is shown is done so purposefully by the CRD. It should be included as an expense, not have its own bold line at the bottom of the report, making it seem like a red flag. This was discussed and supported at a recent WAC (water advisory committee) meeting.
- He will put some options at the bottom of his report and perhaps PAAC can help get the message across as to how vital it is to maintain the agricultural water rate and find additional solutions to increase the incentives for young and old to maintain and increase the productivity of the available farm land.

Discussion noted that the CRD spent thousands of dollars on the Agricultural Water Study, which showed farmers were very conservative water users, less than 2%. We continue to use less water, expenses are the same, so we pay more and more for less and less. Maintaining a reduced water rate for farmers is in our Agricultural Strategy. What is the CRD's objection to a lower rate for farmers?

- b) Farm Economics (Terry Michell) - Carry
- c) Agricultural Land Base (vacant) - Carry
- e) Education and Outreach (Linda Geggie) - Carry

PAC MEMBERSHIP

New Appointments for 2015:

The Secretary advised one application has been received by email and Saanich has four more possible applicants. No word yet from other municipalities if they have received applications. It would be expedient to forward recommendations to the Councils so that new members can be appointed for January. It was agreed that Dianne Williamson and Nikki Tate-Straton, together with the Chair or Vice-Chair, form the sub-committee to review the applications.

The secretary will check with all sponsoring municipalities for applications and prepare a package for the sub-committee before the end of the month.

OTHER BUSINESS

December meeting:

There is no venue available for PAAC's annual Christmas Gathering this year. It was decided due to the current heavy workload, PAAC would hold a regular December meeting this year, to not only tie up loose ends but to consider the submission from Central Saanich on its Agricultural Advisory Committee, which was received today. It was agreed to start the meeting at 7:00 pm.

Adjournment: On a Motion from Dianne Williamson, the meeting adjourned at 9:35 pm

Next Meeting: The next regular PAC meeting is scheduled for **DECEMBER 11, 2014, 7:00 pm**