



**MINUTES OF THE
PENINSULA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION**
Committee Room No. 2, Saanich Municipal Hall
THURSDAY, JUNE 11 2015 AT 7:30 PM

Present: Jack Mar in the Chair; Phil Christie; Linda Geggie; Kim Lonsdale; Bev Marley; Nikki Tate-Straton; Terry Michell; Dianne Williamson; Councillor Derman (Saanich) and Councillor McLennan (Sidney). Also present was Rob Kline, Ministry of Agriculture; Jane Evans, Saanich Planner; and Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Clerk.

Guests: Jesse Howardson, LifeCycles; Mary Alice Johnson, representing Juan de Fuca.

Regrets: Tom Henry, Bernadette Greene, Sam Charlton; Bob Maxwell; Councillors Graham and Stock.

Minutes: Moved by Dianne Williamson and Seconded by Phil Christie: "That the Minutes of May 14, 2015 be adopted as circulated.

CARRIED

Agenda: Two additions to the Agenda: Jesse Howardson from LifeCycles to make presentation on Food Gleaning; and Mary Alice wished to discuss Johnes Disease.

TREASURER'S REPORT – Samantha Chartlon (not present)

- Isobel advised that the change over for signing authority is still in the works, but should be finalized within the next week.
- In the meantime, Bev remains as an official signing authority. Island Savings will do the name change to Peninsula & Area Agricultural Commission at the same time, and we will get some new cheques issued.
- A cheque for \$1,000 from PAAC's account held with the District of Saanich has been deposited in the ISCU account; this will be used to cover smaller expenses from the bus tour, as canceled cheques are required by *Growing Forward 2* in order to have funds reimbursed.

SPEAKER'S BUREAU: Jesse Howardson, Life Cycles – Farm Gleaning

Jessica stated:

- She is a Seed Library Coordinator with Life Cycles.
- Life Cycles was recently contacted by the Mustard Seed to look into Farm Gleaning.
- One of the projects currently operating is for tree fruits; fully trained volunteers harvest the unwanted tree fruits, and take it away in bins to the Mustard Seed, cleaning up all the spoiled fruits on the ground as well. The tree fruit programme is not just for farmers but anyone who has fruit they don't use.
- We are reaching out and asking farmers to think about helping, pointing out the incentives to those who participate – such as tax receipts for the full market value of goods donated and advertising in any promotional material.
- The Mustard Seed serves 7000+ families every month and it would be desirable to provide them with fresh local produce.
- This is a pilot project and will operate from August to October. We are looking for produce that farmers consider "unsaleable".

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- We understand that not all farmers want volunteers on the farms actually picking the produce, but volunteers will pick up the food direct from the farmer. We won't need to use your wash stations.
 - Volunteers are also willing to provide some labour in exchange for the produce, such as weeding.
 - She is looking for feedback on how this programme would best work for the farmer.
 - If at any time you have a crop that is not suitable for market sales, give her a call and a volunteer will be there quickly.
 - Life Cycles will be doing a cost benefit analysis after the end of the pilot project. She hopes the programme will grow into something sustainable and carry on for years.
 - Unfortunately they don't have a website up and running yet but she offered to send updates to PAAC, as well as a copy of their brochure when completed.
 - If members have comments, suggestions or questions they think of later, please let her know.
 - vicseedlibrary@lifecyclesproject.ca (250) 383-5800

Jack Mar noted he always has pumpkins, potatoes and carrots available at the end of the season.

CORRESPONDENCE - none

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – CURRENT

a) Goose Management Strategy (?/Rob)

(noted we still need a volunteer to sit on the committee since Bev resigned)

Rob stated:

- Central Saanich has applied to the province for permits for a cull of 250 geese.
- He expects a response from the Canadian Wildlife Services Branch will be received soon.
- The Ministry of Environment has already approved the application.
- He doesn't know where or when this will happen; it's being kept on the down-low.
- There has only ever been one cull done before in Canada and a full report will be provided to the CRD Board in the fall in terms of continuing to move forward with the programme.

b) Deer Management Strategy (Rob)

Rob stated:

- According to some producers in Central Saanich, the number of deer observed has decreased.
- He is not aware of the status of the programme at the CRD level but it is important that PAAC keep pressure on the CRD and Ministry of Environment for both geese and deer culls.

Jack stated he recently invited Central Saanich Mayor Ryan Windsor to his farm where over 1000' of beans had been eaten by deer and rabbits. He has a permit to shoot and install fencing. There will be an article in the Peninsula Review this week.

Councillor Derman stated:

- The municipalities should also be pressured to take action, as well as the CRD.
- The CRD has no services to deal with geese and deer problems; they had to borrow funding to run the programmes and then to extend the programmes.

- At this time, the Board has not granted any more funding. They would have to establish a new service – and to date, they have not done this; it is a lengthy process.
- He wrote a report to Saanich Council about four years ago recommending we take action and seek solutions on the deer and geese issue.
- The recommendation was in two parts – for both urban and rural municipalities.
- He understands wildlife is a huge problem for our farmers and he intends to bring this report forward again in a revised format sometime this month. We have a new Council and hopefully the recommendations can move forward this time.
- If PAAC wants to write a letter in support of the report, it would be very helpful.

Discussion noted the following points:

- It seems problem wildlife issues are not as important to the CRD as the broader issues of sewer and water.
- The CRD tends to procrastinate for years and get stuck in the paperwork end of things.
- It could be helpful to ask the municipalities to provide financial support for these programmes.
- Almost every farmer has had bad experiences with wildlife and huge financial losses.
- Bio-security is also a major concern to poultry farmers: if one goose lands on the property, the entire operation can be shut down due to concerns about the avian flu. This is a serious issue.
- Every kind of crop can be affected; geese landing in the field not only partially eat the crop, but it is the excrement they leave behind which is a serious problem as well.

Councillor Derman pointed out that the CRD only has the powers granted to it by the municipalities; right now, there is no service for dealing effectively with geese or deer. Unless a special resolution is passed, the geese and deer programmes can only be temporary services.

- He suggests forming a task force in the urban and rural municipalities to get the job done. This is a good time to go to our Councils – the start of a new term.
- If PAAC could get farmers to list the financial and crop losses they have suffered in recent years due to geese and deer, it would be a beneficial addition as an appendix to his report.
- Politicians need to hear the magnitude of this problem.

MOTION: Moved by Phil Christie and Seconded by Kim Lonsdale: “That the Peninsula and Area Agricultural Commission support the intent of Councilor Derman’s report; and further that PAAC encourage the CRD municipalities to take the lead with problem wildlife and outline the issues that affect them, such as bio-security, crop loss and environmental concerns.”

CARRIED

c) CRD Food Systems Strategy (Linda Geggie) nothing to report.

Councillor Derman stated:

- The existing Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) has morphed into the Regional Sustainability Strategy (RSS) over the past four years of review.
- The RGS was an in-house document, without a lot of consultation.
- Modifications to the document were considered with input from task force groups and lots of consultation.
- Unfortunately, the RSS draft bloomed into a large document that had many topics embedded – including the Food Systems Strategy.
- Shortly after the fall elections, the draft RSS was taken to the CRD Board and they determined it was out of hand.

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- It was decided to go back to the original RGS, which was still in effect as it had not been repealed.
- According to provincial legislation, there are certain things the CRD has to include in the document and the opportunity for a food strategy to be part of the RGS does not exist.
- When looking at the existing RGS, we need to include something about climate change – but the many other things that were included in the RSS were too much, according to the Board.
- No new time frame has been established for the review but by default the existing RGS remains in effect until it is replaced.
- In terms of communicating this news to the public, Councillor Derman stated it was determined at a public meeting, with 31 speakers. It is a new Board and they have not yet discussed the issue.

Linda Geggie expressed her disappointment about this decision after four years of work. She felt it was an embarrassment and disrespectful to the citizen engagement process.

Councillor Derman stated:

- The RGS is mandated by the provincial government; the CRD just manages it on behalf of the municipalities.
- Each municipality has to accept the Strategy – and that is not an easy task.
- During this last review, staff asked stakeholders what they wanted to see included, and they tried to accommodate all of it.
- He does not believe that anyone was trying to be irresponsible, but the CRD did not think that the revised RSS document would get passed through the municipalities.
- With the best of intent, it got out of hand and it is not going to pass.
- The task now is to take what we have, modify it so we can have an updated, usable document.
- It would have been better to keep it simple, and at a higher level, developing sub-documents under it.

Linda pointed out that across North America there are over 400 strategies that have successfully changed from the RGS to an RSS. She understands the political decision but this decision should have been made much earlier in the process.

d) ALR Core Review (Linda Geggie) – Nothing to report at this time; hopefully there will be news to report in the fall once the new Chair, Frank Leonard, has had time to review issues.

e) Farmland Trust (Linda, Nikki, Mary Alice) –

Linda noted we had an excellent presentation from Jessica Dennis at the last meeting on Farmland Conservation and Access, and exploring a local government Farmland Trust. The same presentation has been made to the Saanich Environment Committee.

- Jessica is looking for feedback to include in her report to Council, which at present is being discussed at the staff level.
- The Farmland Trust Initiative should happen at the regional level; there was a statement in the RSS to support this – but of course now this could change.

Jane Evans, Saanich Planner, has applied for a grant to *Growing Forward 2* to assist with the Agricultural and Food Systems Plan for Saanich. She hopes to hear a response by June 22nd.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – NEW**◆ Merging Markets – Opportunities for Regional Growers – Report by Susan Tychie**

Linda was speaking on behalf of Susan and stated:

- Over the last 4 or 5 months, following up on a workshop at this year's Farmer2Farmer workshop, we have been looking at the amount of local food production.
- A straw poll was taken by the farmers at the meeting, asking if they were interested in increasing their production levels. It was a unanimous YES.
- Although not everyone was selling out of everything, there seems to be an increasing demand for local produce – but how strong is that demand?
- It was decided to look at where merging markets were and test demand and pricing.
- We talked to independent retailers – such as the Red Barn Markets – rather than the large wholesalers and restaurants.
- We also surveyed schools who incorporate a salad bar and kids' breakfast programmes.
- Emergency food distribution was also considered; there are over 70 food distribution agencies within the CRD who have recently made a commitment to increase their fruit and vegetable levels by 30%.
- Thrifty Foods and the Rotarians have a Food Rescue Project which will divert food otherwise thrown out from Thriftys to the food distribution agencies.
- On Monday, Susan is going to reveal her findings from the study, including the challenges and the opportunities. We will be looking carefully at the implications of these findings for the producers, and how can we take advantage of these trends.
- She understands it is not the best time of the year for the farming community to meet, but it will have implications for this season.
- An email invitation has been sent and the meeting will be held at the Level Ground offices.

● Vegetable Marketing Commission – Quotas on the Island:

Terry Michell spoke about quotas for new growers noting there is a marketing programme across the province for root crops. This is a regulated system. He has met recently with the Minister of Agriculture. There was a Vegetable Marketing Commission hearing but he is not aware of the outcome of the meeting.

The way the system works now if one farmer wants to downsize his quota, he is unable to sell his unwanted portion to another grower. You cannot buy unused quota. If you fail to produce your quota a number of years in a row, then you lose that portion of the quota. Island growers are trying to fight this – we don't want our Island quota going to the larger growers on the mainland.

The Ministry of Agriculture has announced it wants to increase agricultural sales over the next few years – but the farmers don't know how they are going to do this when they are limited in what and how much they can grow. Quotas do not cover organic growers; they have their own guidelines.

Discussion noted that with the drought in California, production and consequently exports to BC will decrease, and prices will increase. This could be beneficial to our local growers whose prices may be more competitive with the rising price of imported produce.

◆ **Johnes Disease – Metchosin area**

Mary Alice stated there has been an outbreak of Johnes Disease in the Western Communities.

- She was talking to John Buchanan who runs a sheep farm; smaller growers are not familiar with this disease and are not sure what to do about it.
- The disease affects not only sheep, but goats and cows – cloven hoof animals – and it can be transmitted through deer.
- We have been able to get a vet from Mill Bay who is good with livestock to do an information session.
- We were planning a farm tour in the area but farmers were concerned about spreading the disease and it was canceled.
- We need to make people more aware and help farmers understand the risks.

Rob Kline stated:

- This is known as a wasting disease. It doesn't show for many years and is not easy to detect.
- The wall of the stomach thickens and the animal dies of malnutrition.
- There is a lot of information available on the disease. He can get information on testing.
- The commercial dairy sector recognizes the problem and it can be dealt with through culling.

Discussion noted:

- The Farmers' Institute on Salt Spring Island may be a resource.
- Once the disease has been detected, the animal(s) have to be put down.

AGRICULTURAL STRATEGY – SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS

a) Water (Michael Doehnel) – not present

b) Farm Economics (Terry Michell)

Terry stated:

- Berry crops were early this year – almost 3 weeks ahead of schedule – and bigger volumes too.
- All vegetables and grains are growing well. Wheat is in great demand from the bakeries.
- The volume of grain crops grown on the Peninsula has increased over the past few years; it is more than the cover crop it used to be.
- He has already cut his first hay crop; volume is up 25% this year. He grows about 3 to 4 tons per acre, which is about 1,000 bales. Farmers may be able to get a second cut if it doesn't dry up too much.
- The main concern for farmers is lack of rain and water.
- Galey Farms lost a lot of potatoes due to a heavy frost this spring.
- He has heard that there is sufficient water for a two-year drought; farmers who have their own irrigation ponds will be drawing more CRD water as the ponds dry up.
- Drip irrigation is being used now on a lot of farms, which is much more efficient and produces better berry crops.

c) Agricultural Land Base (Phil Christie)

Phil stated he has not had a meeting yet with his sub-committee.

- He noted that the land base will gradually erode within the urban areas and that we should use the lands more intensively outside of the urban core.

d) Resource Stewardship – Kim Lonsdale

- Kim stated there is a serious drought on the western part of the Continent.

- He is interested in how sewage treatment could provide a water supply for irrigation.
- Councillor Derman stated the August CRD Water Board meeting will hear a presentation on the process to produce distilled quality water. This has been marketed in other places, and they say it is drinking quality water.
- The drought in California is the worst we have seen since 1941.
- The Sooke Reservoir is full and apparently sufficient for two seasons.
- Eventually, we will be able to use the water stored in the Leach River Watershed, but probably not for another 20 years – the forestation needs to grow back to form a natural filtration system.
- Kim stated the question to ask is not if we need water today – but do we need water in the future.
- Phil noted that we had good future planning in this area with raising the damn, but up-Island, the Cowichan Valley, rely on wells and agriculture will suffer this year.
- Terry stated a 500 acre farm in Schwimm, Washington, can't use water from the river in July because the levels are so low. You can tell how serious this is from the lack of the usual snowcap on the Olympic Mountains.

e) Education and Outreach (Linda Geggie)

Saanich Fair:

(note, this was the first item discussed at the meeting; Nikki left the meeting after this item at 8 pm.)

Nikki distributed sign up sheets for volunteers for the Saanich Fair – both for the PAAC booth and the ever-popular zucchini races. She stated:

- It is hoped there will be a large squash display, complete with recipes.
- The zucchini races are very popular with the kids, but lots of help is needed, both to help supervise the making of the “zucchini cars” and the actual races. CR-Fair has the track and Bob Thompson helps with set up.
- Linda may be able to round up volunteers for the zucchini races.
- The PAAC tent will be set up beside the zucchini races; volunteers needed in both tents. Last year we were short of volunteers. She asked people to put the word out – politicians and business people can help out too.
- Free passes are provided to volunteers.
- In order to make the early July deadline for the Saanich Fair programme, we have to firm up speakers for the education tent; suggestions to date include:
 - Nikki Wylie on backyard chickens. She spoke before and was very popular
 - Carolyn Herriot
 - Stacey Towes, Level Ground
 - Jessica Dennis, Land Access for farmers. She spoke at the May PAAC meeting.
 - Ray Travers – bee keeping. He spoke last year; has a great display for the talk.
 - Noted that we have the tent for the 3 days and rent the PA system, so if we can get two speakers for each day, that would be good.
 - Nikki's daughter can prepare the posters and info sheets the same as last year.
 - We need a new PAAC brochure. *(Isobel advised she has this in hand; she will distribute the existing brochure to members and ask for comments/additions/changes, etc.)*
 - In the past it has been suggested we compile squash recipe sheets, everything from appys, to soups, main courses and desserts, to complement the squash display. Bev offered to coordinate the recipe sheets.
 - Last year there was a last minute problem with tents and it was a bit of a scramble. Bev has two pop-up tents we can use..
 - We also need a tent for the educational speakers – this is located in a quieter area of the fair.

- Isobel has the banners, brochures, sandwich board, name tags, etc. and will bring them to the fair on Friday.
- Display items (hay, corn stalks, squash, pumpkins and other veg.) will come from Jack Mar, Terry Michell and Dianne Williamson.
- Nikki advised she will be in touch via email. If anyone has any other ideas, please let her know.

Spring Farm Bus Tour:

- Bev and Isobel reported that everything is in hand. Thanks to great assistance from Rob Kline, we have been successful in our funding application with *Growing Forward 2* through the Strategic Outreach Initiative. They will refund authorized expenses.
- Isobel and Tom (our bus driver) drove the route again today and confirmed with Terry that people should park at the back of his farm market on Island View Road rather than at the farm.
- Bev has lunch organized, with much of the food donated, including local wines.
- Mike Doehnel and Ryan Vantreight will be our speakers on the bus and Bev has arranged for someone from the BC Horse Council to speak at the lunch.
- About 32 have signed up for the tour. Unfortunately, no one from the ALC, including new Chair Frank Leonard, can make the tour. We do have two MLAs, Lana Popham, the agriculture critic, and Garry Holman. Every member municipality is represented and as well as a few members from the Water Advisory Commission, Agricultural Advisory Committees and municipal planners.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Linda advised members of the Strawberries and Wine Festival coming up on June 20/21. Information can be found at www.flavortrail.com

Adjournment: On a Motion from Kim Lonsdale the meeting adjourned at 9:15 pm
Next Meeting: The next regular PAC meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, September 10, 2015** at 7:30 pm, Saanich Municipal Hall.

WEBSITE: Members were asked to advise of any information items to place on the website.
<http://saanich.ca/living/afs/index.html>

I hereby certify this is a true and correct copy of the Minutes.

Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary