



**MINUTES OF THE  
PENINSULA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION  
Council Chambers, Saanich Municipal Hall  
THURSDAY, JANUARY 10, 2016 AT 7:30 PM**

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Present: Bob Maxwell in the Chair; Samantha Charlton; Phil Christie; Linda Geggie; Bernadette Greene; Jack Mar; Bev Marley; Terry Michell; Dianne Williamson; Councillors Stock and Weisenberger (North Saanich), Graham (Central Saanich) and Derman (Saanich). Also present was Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Clerk. New members Carol Davidson and Larry Sluggett were also present (positions not yet ratified by the sponsoring councils).

Guests: Neil Findlow, Senior Planner, Saanich; Michael Doehnel, PAAC Water Representative.

Regrets: Councillors McLennan and Kahakauwila; Nikki Tate-Straton, Rob Kline.

Minutes: Moved by Bernadette Greene and Seconded by Jack Mar: "That the Minutes of November 12, 2015 be adopted with a change to page 2 re Goose Management, noting that there originally between 80-100 geese were brought to the Island, not 500 as stated in the minutes".

CARRIED

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### **TREASURER'S REPORT – Samantha Charlton**

Current balance in PAAC's account is \$1,119, with a \$1,000 in a non-cashable GIC.

### **SPEAKER'S BUREAU:** no speakers scheduled.

Phil Christie suggested that Blair Surridge, who is currently researching pesticides in our food, would be a good speaker for a future meeting. He has developed a method to quickly test pesticides in fruit and vegetables.

- Discussion noted that if PAAC were to host a larger-scale event in conjunction with another group, there could be funding assistance available through the Strategic Outreach Initiative Programme.
- Perhaps a "Farmers' Forum" would be a possibility, where farmers can chat with other farmers about the issues they face and a speaker, or speakers, could be part of the forum.
- Linda Geggie noted she has had so many topics suggested for the Farmer2Farmer workshop that not all can be included. Perhaps a second workshop, or forum, could be held.
- It was suggested we could have four speakers – two in the morning and two in the afternoon, some being participatory in nature. However, others thought it should be more of a social gathering in a relaxed setting.
- Linda Geggie offered to check into the Strategic Outreach Programme and see if any grant monies are available, deadlines and criteria.

CARRY for further discussion

### **CORRESPONDENCE**

- PAAC response to Sue Gordon, Ministry of Agriculture (Duncan office), regarding damage from wildlife. A few PAAC members met informally in December to discuss the issue and prepared the detailed response, which was emailed to Ms. Gordon and Rob Kline.
- Qualicum is beginning to work with a Regional Wildlife Biologist to address its problems with wildlife, geese in particular.

- Mike Hicks, CRD, announced a proposal at the CRD meeting yesterday that anyone with a permit to shoot geese during the approved hunting seasons would be allowed to increase the bag limit. This proposal will be submitted to the province for approval.
  - Councillor Derman noted that some municipalities are already allowed to do this; the idea is to be consistent. If this new regulation comes into effect, it will be an effective way to reduce the geese population.
  - Terry Michell stated a person from the Ministry of Environment was checking out the geese and other wildlife near his farm yesterday. Apparently there is a group of ministry officials who go across Canada each year; they know about the issues geese are causing and advised the federal government is looking in to the problem.
- b) PAAC letter to the BC Fruit Growers Society requesting funding to support future PAAC projects.
- After many successful years, the BC Fruit Growers Society is dissolving and has \$800,000 to distribute to various non-profit groups and organizations.
  - February 1<sup>st</sup> they will distribute the funds to many agriculture-related groups, such as PAAC and the DFMA. \$30,000 has been allocated to schools within the district, as well as amounts to the Saanich Peninsula Hospital, the Mt. Newton Society, Shady Creek Church and the Boys and Girls Club.
  - Jack Mar is also trying to get some of the funds allocated to the Martindale Valley project.

## AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – NEW

- ◆ **5058 West Saanich Road – Request for inclusion in the ALR (Carol Davidson, owner)  
Neil Findlow, Senior Planner with Saanich, was present to elaborate on the application.**

*(noted that new member Carol Davidson is the applicant for this matter; she will stay for the presentation and to answer any questions from the Commission but excuse herself from any other discussions and deliberations)*

Mr. Findlow stated:

- The application is to include 3.7 ha of the site at 5058 West Saanich Road in the ALR.
- The property is currently zoned A-1 which permits all forms of agriculture.
- The applicant proposes to return the site to a productive organic farm with sheep, plants and an orchard.
- Local food production is an important objective, supported by the Municipality's OCP.
  - Planning is not convinced however that this is a good site for inclusion in the ALR. The site is split by the Interurban Rail Trail – which can lead to problems with trail users;
  - Unfortunately, the trail corridor is not wide enough to plant a buffer.
  - The area of the site available for farming is not that big and could not accommodate buffers within the site; this would make it hard to address security issues;
  - 80% of the site is environmentally sensitive;
  - 70% of the site is protected by a conservation covenant;
  - Much of the site is within the Environmental Development Permit Area (EDPA) and the Streamside Development Permit Area;
- Planning sees the need to balance agriculture and environmental values; but there is a concern that inclusion within the ALR could lead to environmental degradation of the site.
- Lands in the ALR are exempt from the EDPA and the Streamside DPAs and would be out of Saanich's control.
- Planning will be preparing a comprehensive report for Council. One of the options will be to forward the application to the ALC with or without a recommendation and let the ALC decide.

Councillor Derman stated:

- There is a concern on Council about the implications of the Right to Farm Act.
- In the past few years we have had instances where legislation has been used for less than pure motives – Panama Flats, Watkiss Way, lands in the Blenkinsop Valley, for example.
- There is some concern on Council about how to balance what we know without leaving loopholes: Property in the ALR minimizes Council's control.
- He is not in any way indicating how Council will vote on this matter – he is just indicating that there are some concerns.

Carol Davidson, applicant, stated:

- She is fully aware of the covenants on the property and this is one of the reasons she recently enrolled in UVIC's Environmental Studies Programme so she can be fully knowledgeable of the implications.
- She has managed to site a septic field, a small, heritage style house and a driveway in the small amount of land that remains to her without disturbing one of the protected trees that take up about half of the area left for her to use.
- She comes from a farm background, has been a successful farmer in her own right and no one has ever complained about her farming practices.
- She is aware the soil is clay-based but is also aware that it can be made arable if you invest enough time and money.
- There is peat on site and she plans to improve the soils.
- As to encroachment of the DPAs, that is a possibility. Two of the DP areas have either been pasture or mowed over the past 80 years – there is nothing there to protect.
- She already has a Streamside Protection Buffer and does not plan to go into this area.
- What she is proposing on the site will not affect the riparian areas.
- She feels Planning's concerns may be valid but they are not well-founded in this case.
- It is her intention to install fencing between West Saanich Road and Interurban Road to preclude anyone coming on to the property except small animals. Her neighbours tell her it is not animals that cause damage but people. She is thinking of installing a security system.
- She understands many people are actively working to get land out of the ALR; she thought it would be good to add to the ALR lands.
- She is not the only isolated ALR parcel.
- If successful, it might be an incentive for others with smaller properties to do the same thing.
- ALR lands are disappearing and she thought this was the right thing to do.
- She is very dedicated to agriculture and wants to do what she can to support the concept.
- She is working hard to preserve the natural site areas on the property and wants to work just as hard on the agricultural side.
- If her application is unsuccessful, things could get messy.
- Saanich applied the Streamside Development Permit area to her property incorrectly; she spent \$13,000 on a high level survey and part of the Streamside DPA has been removed from her property. The riparian part of it is within the Interurban Road allowance.
- Unfortunately, Saanich has decided to make the entire area an EDPA; she asked how this was justified – as she was told it was simply because the person doing the mapping couldn't make the line any thinner on the map.
- The area has been fallow for over 20 years and this has allowed the alder thicket to continue to grow and it is unsuitable for sheep.
- 80% of her property is forest cover and she would like to have 2.5 acres cleared for farming.
- She was told after she bought the property that the EDPA would be removed as it was incorrectly applied in the first place.
- She knows the soil has a high clay content and doesn't perk well.
- If it is ploughable and drainable, the soils could be brought to a class 2 or 3.

PAAC suggested that the property be surveyed by a professional agrologist as there hasn't been enough research into the actual soil classification.

\*\*\*Councillor Chris Graham entered the meeting at 8:15 pm\*\*\*

Councillor Derman advised that the EDPA is under review and there will be a second town hall meeting to allow the public to voice their concerns. A report will be prepared and Saanich will look at what changes, if any, need to be made. The EDPA is new and properties do get removed if it is appropriate. Council probably has a bias to include land in the ALR if there is a good reason to do so.

\*\*\*Carol Davidson left the meeting during the following PAAC discussions\*\*\*

- There are pros and cons to the application and merit on both sides.
- The general feeling was that perhaps Saanich Planning did not have enough factual information to make a recommendation.
- An agrologist has to examine the property and indicate whether or this this would be a good addition to the ALR and whether a farm would be successful on the property.
- The agrologist should indicate how much money would need to be spent to improve the property to bring it up to standard, and the applicant advise whether or not she is willing to pay for that and meet the conditions.
- The application could then be sent to the ALC for inclusion in the ALR.
- Councillor Derman noted Saanich Council would also be looking at the long-term effects of an ALR designation: eg. what happens when the applicant sells the property or is unable to farm.
- The better the soil quality – the better the farm. Some good quality farmland is being paved over for greenhouses and wineries, but class 5, 6 or even 7 can be used for pasture; whereas class 1 or 2 is needed for vegetables. The point being that some type of farming can be done on any land class.
- If someone wants to include poorer class soil in the ALR, there should be provisions for this.
- Noted there were sheep on this property in the 1950s. About 70% of the properties in this area at one time had livestock.
- A lot of land throughout the lower Island used to be farmed and for various reasons is not now.
- ALR properties should be defensible.

Mr. Findlow stated:

- The point is not so much related to what type of farm the applicant intends to have, but rather the combination of various things that relate to this property.
- The motivation is to get around the environmentally sensitivities of the site to allow parts of the land to be farmed.
- It is a matter of balancing environmental and agricultural issues.
- The information we have to work with was sparse; it would be improved with a report from an agrologist or other professional.
- There were no conservation covenants in the 1950s.

**MOTION: Moved by Phil Christie and Seconded by Samantha Charlton: "That the Peninsula and Area Agricultural Commission advises that further information on the agricultural capability of the property at 5058 West Saanich Road should be obtained from a qualified agrologist."**

**CARRIED**

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Neil Findlow thanked the Commission and left the meeting at 8:50 pm.

Carol Davidson was invited back to the meeting.

Noted that it would be beneficial to see a clear map of where the EDPA and the Riparian zone are exactly on the property and it should be determined whether the EDPA designation is legitimate.

Carol Davidson was advised of the Commission's recommendation, and she stated that she got rid of the reed canary grass and the retention pond. Using the maps, she explained where the EDPA areas and the riparian zones are on the property. She has spent over \$13,000 already to hire a professional biologist and surveyors.

#### ◆ **Maber Flats Drainage Issues – Larry Sluggett**

Mr. Sluggett distributed maps showing the 10, 20 and 200 year flood plain for the Maber Flats area, which is located between Wallace Drive, Keating X Road and West Saanich Road. The map also showed a water detention pond that Central Saanich proposes to try to address the flooding issues.

- This is a long-term plan and it is in the initial stages. He understands that Central Saanich has already purchased the property.
- The plan was proposed about 7 or 8 years ago at an estimated cost of \$4 to \$5 million.
- The project will be one of the single biggest agricultural issues in Central Saanich at this time.
- The management of surface water is a big problem and it affects food production.
- The Central Saanich Agricultural Advisory Committee oppose the project as proposed.
- PAAC's mandate is to advise municipalities on matters involving agriculture and to facilitate development of programmes for implementation of the Saanich Peninsula Strategic Objectives.
- He asked that PAAC take a position on this matter, make a decision based on the facts – either in support or opposition, and advise Central Saanich accordingly.
- He is proposing that PAAC take the lead on this: make a formal request to obtain the technical data from Central Saanich and evaluate the merits of the plan.
- If Central Saanich is going to spend this amount of money to address the drainage problem, he feels there are areas that need it more.
- This has been a very controversial issue for many years.
- What has been lacking in his opinion are the facts.

Discussion ensued noting the following points:

- Members agreed PAAC should create a sub-committee to review the data, meet on site with staff and other experts to explain the rationale for the proposed plan, bring that information back to the Commission and together make a decision.
- Some concern from members that we had not been asked to provide an opinion by Council.
- Noted Central Saanich has a lot of unused farmland; so is there a real need to drain this land and spend a huge sum of money.
- When we continually drain land, it can lead to other environmental problems.
- Doesn't the Martindale Valley need attention more than this area?

Councillor Graham (Central Saanich) stated he didn't think Council would have a problem providing the information to PAAC, noting it would be beneficial to have a second opinion. Perhaps the Engineer or other staff member could attend a meeting for some discussion. All the staff reports and other information should be available on the website. If clarification or more information is needed, he suggested the Engineer be contacted.

**MOTION: Moved by Linda Geggie and Seconded by Bernadette Greene: “That the issue of drainage on Maber Flats be referred to the Agricultural Land Base Committee for review of the technical data and on-site meetings, and eventually report back to the Commission.”**

**CARRIED**

Noted the sub-committee will be comprised of Phil Christie, Sam Charlton, Jack Mar, Terry Michell, and Larry Sluggett; if anyone else would like to take part, advise Phil. The Chair noted that PAAC can go further afield to get professional or expert advice if required; you don't necessarily have to be a PAAC member to be on a sub-committee.

## **AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – CURRENT**

- a) **Goose Management Strategy (Bev/Rob)** – see discussion under “correspondence”
- b) **Deer Management Strategy (Rob)** - Not present - nothing to report
- x) **CRD Food Systems Strategy (Linda Geggie)** .
  - The CRD food strategy is still going forward. Derek Masselink is the lead consultant. It is supposed to be completed by the end of the month.

Councillor Derman stated after the CRD received considerable public input on the proposed RGS last year, the Board thought the document was immensely bloated. Staff were instructed to start again. The new RGS will be a smaller document and the Food Strategy will be connected to it as an umbrella document.

- d) **ALR Core Review (Linda Geggie)** – nothing to report
- e) **Farmland Trust (Linda, Nikki, Mary Alice)** – nothing to report

## **AGRICULTURAL STRATEGY – SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS**

- a) **Water (Michael Doehnel)**
  - We used a lot of water this summer due to drought conditions and exceeded the budget by 30%.
  - This supports the need to apply more compost to reduce water use – but the increased water use could also mean we are growing more food.
  - For the 3<sup>rd</sup> year in a row, the Water Commission has agreed to keep the water rates the same.

Councillor Derman stated:

- He sits on the Water Commission and noted that the CRD's Water Conservation Programme has been very successful; people are using less water than they were 15 years ago.
- However, there are fixed costs with supplying water and infrastructure needs to be maintained.
- Water rates could be increasing eventually. The gap between the agricultural rate and the other users is growing and some Water Commission members think the gap is getting too big.
- He acknowledged that farmers use less than 3% of the total consumption, but there will come a time when the lower rate will no longer be acceptable.
- Perhaps we don't need to use treated water for everything – such as washing cars.

- b) **Farm Economics (Terry Michell)**

- He met recently with Dave McAllister from Central Saanich about the Martindale Valley drainage.

- Mr. McAllister would like to set up a meeting with the stakeholders and suggested March or April, but Terry advised we need to have the meeting as soon as possible. A mid-February date is being explored.

With respect to farm economics, Linda Geggie noted an interesting study is being conducted in Ontario regarding the falling price of the Canadian dollar. For every cent the dollar drops, the price of food increases by 1%. As a lot of our food is imported from the US and Mexico, this is good news for our local farm community, whose prices are now comparable.

c) **Agricultural Land Base (Phil Christie)** – nothing to report; See discussion under Maber Flats

d) **Resource Stewardship – (vacant)**

e) **Education and Outreach (Linda Geggie)**

- The **Island Agriculture Show** will be held February 12 and 13, 2016 at Cowichan Exhibition Park in Duncan. <http://www.iashow.ca>

Sam Charlton stated:

- The day before the Island Agriculture Show on Thursday, February 11 there will be a **Water Storage Farm Tour**, leaving from the Cowichan Exhibition Park grounds. [cowichan@bcagclimateaction.ca](mailto:cowichan@bcagclimateaction.ca)
- The **Farmer2Farmer Workshop** is on March 1, 2016 at the Saanichton Fairgrounds.
- An advisory committee will be meeting to discuss which key workshop topics to select, using the evaluation forms from last year's event. There have been many topics put forward.
- There will be a keynote address as well as the workshops and "ask an expert" tables where participants can move around from table to table and have their questions answered; many topics will be covered including accounting, labour rules and regulations, pest control, taxation issues.
- Suggested the three proposed workshops will focus on technical skills, advocacy and policy, marketing and business.
  - Under the technical skills side, some of the topics suggested for this year include:
    - Pest disease management
    - On-farm cold storage
    - Crop planning
    - On-farm water management
  - Under advocacy and policy, some suggestions are:
    - Lack of a farm voice.
    - Farmers' institutes: Is there a need to have a regional farm organization? There have been successful organizations but no unified farm organization that speaks for the farmers. The IFA has not been able to get off the ground. Obviously PAAC has a role, but do we need an organization with more advocacy?
- Terry Michell noted that Food Safety is a topical issue. Commercial operations have to have food safety audits.

Linda presented a letter requesting PAAC support the Farmer2Farmer Workshop again this year. Past support has been \$500.

**MOTION: Moved by Samantha Charlton and Seconded by Jack Mar: "That the Peninsula & Area Agricultural Commission support the 2016 Farmer2Farmer Workshop with a \$500 contribution."**

**CARRIED**

**Suggestions for future speakers at PAAC meetings:**

The Greater Victoria Development Agency is interested in meeting with the farm community. They are trying to leverage provincial and federal funds, with one of the areas being agriculture. Perhaps we should invite Dallas Gislason to a meeting. Councillor Derman noted the GVDA have already made a presentation to Saanich Council and it would logical to invite them here.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

Michael Doechnel stated that Rob Kline is on his way to retirement. The Commission agreed that it is vital that his position be filled; there is a definite need for expert advice from a professional agrologist. The Chair suggested we send a letter to the Ministry accordingly.

Adjournment: On a Motion from Bev Marley the meeting adjourned at 9:30 pm

Next Meeting: The next regular PAC meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, February 11, 2016** 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.

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