



**MINUTES OF THE
PENINSULA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
Council Chambers, Saanich Municipal Hall
THURSDAY, February 11, 2016 AT 7:30 PM**

Present: Phil Christie; Carol Davidson; Jack Mar; Bev Marley; Bob Maxwell; Larry Sluggett; Dianne Williamson; Councillors Weisenberger (North Saanich), Graham (Central Saanich) and Derman (Saanich). Also present was Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Clerk.

Guests: Neil Findlow, Senior Planner, Saanich; Michael Doehnel, PAAC Water Representative, Clayton & Ross Fox.

Regrets: Councillors McLennan and Kahakauwila; Samantha Charlton; Linda Geggie; Bernadette Greene; Terry Michell; Nikki Tate-Straton, Rob Kline.

Election of Officers for 2016:

Moved by Larry Sluggett and Seconded by Carol Davidson: "That Jack Mar and Bob Maxwell remain as Co-Chairs for 2016."

Carried

The Secretary advised that Samantha Charlton was unable to attend the meeting but was willing to continue as Treasurer for 2016.

Jack Mar assumed the Chair.

Minutes: Moved by Dianne Williamson and Seconded by Bev Marley: "That the Minutes of January 10, 2016 be adopted with a change to page 2 re BC Fruit Growers Association, noting they allocated \$30,000 to each of the four schools in the Saanich School District."

CARRIED

TREASURER'S REPORT – Samantha Chartlon – not present

Bob Maxwell announced that after 100 years, the BC Fruit Growers Association is dissolving and they sold their property at the corner of Veyaness and Keating X Road. Because they were a non-profit society, they had to disperse the funds to other charitable groups or non-profits. PAAC wrote to the Association requesting a donation, and last week a cheque for \$25,000 was received.

As noted at the January meeting, other recipients included schools, the Saanich Peninsula Hospital, the Mt. Newton Society, Shady Creek Church, the Boys and Girls Club. Larry Sluggett noted the Fruit Growers' Association also gave \$50,000 to the South Victoria Direct Farm Marketing Association, \$25,000 to the Brentwood Community Club and \$10,000 to the Peninsula Country Market.

MOTION: Moved by Bev Marley and Seconded by Dianne Williamson: "That PAAC write a letter of thanks to the Fruit Growers' Association for their donation to the Commission."

Carried.

Apparently they don't want any press regarding their generous donations but members feel there should be some more exposure about their involvement in the community. It would make a good story, something positive to raise the profile of agriculture.

Discussion ensued:

– Carol Davidson offered to write a press release about the history of the Fruit Growers' Association.

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- If there are any more funds to disperse, perhaps the Association could consider sponsoring an agrologist for a year, including salary and a vehicle.
- Jack Mar is still hoping that some funds will be made available for improvements to the Martindale Valley flooding issues – if that goes ahead.
- Noted there is a lot of history regarding agriculture in the south Island; perhaps this could be documented in a book; funds donated by the Fruit Growers' Association could be used.
- Agreed that once all the monies have been dispersed by the Association, we can approach them about doing a story, press release, etc.

SPEAKER'S BUREAU: Swatti Scott, RD, IBCLC, Community Nutritionist, Island Health

Ms. Scott stated:

- She is interested in how farmers can promote the health aspect and benefits of our local produce better, which in turn could help reduce current health care costs.
- She has attended a number of food security sessions and CR-Fair events.
- Food security is an integral part of her job, which includes working with high-risk pre-natal programmes.
- Preliminary reports have shown that food security and healthy communities are a top concern and these topics have recently been discussed at the UBCM convention.
- She has always been a big promoter of farming and believes that people need to know where their food comes from.
- There has been a big thrust on healthy eating strategies at the provincial level – although we are still waiting to hear what the strategy will be, as this was supposed to be released last year. When it is eventually released, it will be big news.
- We know what makes people healthy, but unfortunately the food in the grocery stores is not necessarily healthy. We need to put the focus on eating local and being connected to our farmers.
- Recently, our food prices have been increasing significantly in the produce area due to the drought in California and the fall of the Canadian dollar.
- However, compared to other parts of the world, Canadians spend a lower percentage of their income on food.
- She plans to make presentations to local Councils and would like them to take some action on agricultural issues.
- Saanich has had a Healthy Communities committee for some time, but none of the other municipalities do. (Councilor *Derman noted there is a natural connection between the Healthy Saanich Committee and PAAC; perhaps PAAC should consider inviting the chair to a PAAC meeting*)
- We are starting to see an increase in chronic diseases which in turn increase health care costs.
- There is a strong movement right now to work on health in our schools and districts have a dietician assigned. Eight schools on the Island are involved in the "Healthy Schools Project".
- She would like to see vegetable gardens in schools – this has a lot of positive effects, social, physical, and mental health.
- She suggested that the Farm Fresh Guide could be an App on cell phones, allowing people to access the guide from anywhere, quickly locating fresh produces and other farm products.

The Chair thanked Ms. Swatti for her presentation.

BUSINESS ARISING – January 10, 2016

The suggestion of a **Farmers' Forum** was brought up at the last meeting, noting that perhaps there would be funding available through the Strategic Outreach Investment Agriculture fund. Linda Geggie investigated, and at this time, there is no funding available. There could be in the future however.

- Bev Marley stated she thought getting local farmers together, both experienced and new farmers, would be a way for them to connect, get to know each other, network and share their knowledge.
- Members agreed, noting that there was more networking and active farm organizations in the past. Perhaps it is time to create a new society because important connections are being lost.
- At one time, Strawberry Days attracted over 300 people; now this has dwindled to a few.
- Phil Christie noted that the Water Storage Farm Tour in Cowichan Valley today was sold out in two days; there are two more days of workshops and events over the weekend.
- In Courtenay, 50 old-time farmers are planning to meet with younger dedicated farmers to try and help them get started on the land. Land prices are cheaper in that area than on the Peninsula – but it is farmers working together for the greater good.
- Suggested a programme could be developed through 4-H Clubs. The Club has a difficult time finding leaders to help them with programmes. 4-H is a great way for kids and youth to learn about all aspects of farming.

Swatti Scott stated that the topic of how to get young people interested in farming has come up at meetings, given the issues farmers face today, including the high cost of farmland and getting started. Where would a young potential farmer go to get this kind of information? There is interest here; we need to get the two groups (both young and experienced farmers) together.

CORRESPONDENCE

- Letter from Central Saanich regarding Maber Flats, referring letter from Clayton Fox for information. See discussion under Agricultural Land Base on page 6 of these minutes.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – NEW - none**AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – CURRENT****a) Goose Management Strategy (Bev/Rob)**

Bev stated:

- She attended the meeting last week at the CRD, which was supposed to take place in October. She, and many others, were disheartened about the discussions at the meeting.
- The CRD did not want to take ownership of the Goose Strategy and she feels the last five years of work was going to be for nothing. Apparently there is about \$10,000 left in the fund.
- She noted that Ryan Windsor, Mayor of Central Saanich, was very enthusiastic about continuing with the programme, noting we there has been progress in the past five years, and he is prepared to take the issue to Ottawa himself if necessary.

Discussion noted:

- A complaint was received because a farmer was shooting at geese on his property in the Mt. Newton Valley. Agreed it can be dangerous to shoot at geese but we need to educate people who live in the agricultural areas of a municipality about the legal use of firearms.

- Two suggestions to increase public awareness: (1) Post a sign at the subject property advising neighbours that the farmer has permission to shoot the geese; and (2) include an article in Central Saanich's quarterly newsletter to advise neighbours about the permitting process and the need to control the geese populations would be helpful.
- What we need is consistent bylaws regarding hunting regulations in each municipality.
- Perhaps having someone from the gun club attend a meeting would be helpful; maybe some of the gun club members could assist with the hunting.
- Flexibility on setbacks so that farmers could combine their farm areas and qualify for a permit should be considered.

Councillor Graham stated in response to a January 17 letter from Mike Hicks, Juan de Fuca Regional Director, suggesting that municipalities collectively change bylaws to allow for limited and controlled hunting of geese on select farms, Central Saanich is in the process of amending its Firearms bylaw to allow people to hunt on their own property, including making setbacks less restrictive. He agreed putting an article in the newsletter was a good idea. Information about the proposed bylaw changes can be found on the municipality's website.

*Note: the Motion from Central Saanich Council regarding the bylaw change is as follows:
That the Central Saanich Firearms Bylaw be amended by including the clause "Any landowner or nominee with a current Canadian Wildlife Service Crop Protection Permit, may hunt, for sustenance, on their permitted lands using the Federal Migratory Birds regulations and in possession of a valid federal Migratory Game Bird Hunting Permit".*

Bob Maxwell noted that Kate Hagmeir, who assisted the CRD with research for the Goose Management Strategy, has the contract to manage the geese in the Okanagan, and the population has been reduced to 2,500. This has been done with egg addling.

MOTION: Moved by Phil Christie and Seconded by Bev Marley: "That PAAC write to the member municipalities suggesting they consider changes to their Firearms Bylaws in a similar fashion to Central Saanich, in accordance to the suggestions from Regional Director Mike Hicks, outlined in his January 17, 2016 letter to Central Saanich Council."

CARRIED

Suggested that it would be beneficial to ask Mike Hicks to attend a PAAC meeting to provide clarification.

- b) Deer Management Strategy (Rob)** Not present - nothing to report
- c) CRD Food Systems Strategy (Linda Geggie)** .Not Present – nothing to report
- d) 5058 West Saanich Road – Request for inclusion in the ALR**
(see discussion January 10, 2016 minutes)

Carol Davidson, applicant and owner of the property at 5058 West Saanich Road, and also a new PAAC member, submitted a letter to the PAAC members regarding comments from the last meeting and outlining steps she has taken to date regarding the proposed ALR inclusion. At the January 10, 2016 meeting, PAAC made a motion to suggest a qualified agrologist be hired to assess the agricultural capability of the soil.

Ms. Davidson stated:

- She has been unable to get an agrologist to come to the property; either they are retired, too busy or have not returned her calls.
- She spoke to Liz Sutton of the ALC who indicated that as part of the submission Saanich could ask the ALC to consider the existing Natural State Covenant currently registered against the title, which would assure Saanich has control not only of the trees but the environmental aspect also.
- This would mean if the ALR designation is applied, the covenant and non-arable areas will be protected.
- She has no interest in cutting down trees and is concerned how much money she may have to invest to bring the property up to a certain standard.
- She has done everything by the book so far, her intentions are honorable.
- Some of the issues raised by the Planning Department are red herrings: such as the need for a buffer and the soil conditions. In her opinion, there is no need for a 20' buffer and her soil is good.

Councillor Derman stated he visited the property today.

- He did have a concern about the Minutes from the January meeting, noting he was not speaking about this particular property, but more in general terms.
- In the past, Council has generally favoured putting property into the ALR – such as Panama Flats.
- He has no concerns about the applicant's intentions, but Council has to look at the long-term situation, in other words, what the next owner of the property may do.
- Also, as a councillor, he is not allowed to take a position on the matter prior to the Public Hearing.

PAAC comments noted:

- the intent of the Motion was to suggest more information about the land's agricultural capability would be helpful and support the application to the ALC; it was not intended to hinder the applicant, but rather to help her.
- Before bringing the parcel into the ALR, the ALC will need to know the agricultural capability based on a soil survey of the property.
- It was further noted that PAAC is an advisory commission to help local government.

Neil Findlow, Senior Planner with Saanich, stated that the application has the option to request Planning to proceed with the Council report to the ALC with or without a recommendation.

Discussion ensued and the following comments were noted:

- One member stated that while he is in favour of everything the applicant is planning to do, perhaps the property is not in keeping with other ALR parcels: it is remote – but he doesn't see that as a problem.
- The major issue is the soil classification – and he feels this information would be very helpful in moving the application forward.
- The property can be farmed whether or not it is in the ALR.

A point of order was raised by Councillor Weisenberger about a potential conflict of interest in continuing to discuss the matter in this forum because the applicant is a PAAC member.

MOTION: Moved by Phil Christie and Seconded by Bob Maxwell: “That continued discussion at the PAAC meetings on the proposed ALR inclusion for the property at 5058 West Saanich Road be put aside for now. Further discussions could take place outside of the PAAC meeting with the applicant, Bob Maxwell and Phil Christie, if deemed necessary.”

CARRIED

AGRICULTURAL STRATEGY – SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS

- a) **Water (Michael Doehnel)** - Present, but nothing to report at this time.
- b) **Farm Economics (Terry Michell)** – Not present.
Michael Doehnel noted that the daffodils and hazelnut trees are flowering two weeks ahead of schedule this year.
- c) **Agricultural Land Base (Phil Christie)**

Maber Flats

Phil Christie stated the sub-committee is meeting on site at Maber Flats on February 16 at 1:00 pm. Joining us will be the Engineer from Central Saanich. We will then move to Martindale Flats. Clayton Fox was invited to attend the meetings on the 16th, although it was noted there will also be a stakeholders discussion on March 15th.

Clayton noted that 25 years ago, there was flooding on Maber Flats and Central Saanich cleaned out Graham Creek, which resolved a lot of the flooding issues. This area always floods in the winter and it is more difficult to access the creek due to private property. He has photos from 1997 when the entire area was being farmed. He has written to Central Saanich about the issue and met with David McAllister, Director of Engineering and Public Works, Central Saanich. He noted in his January 20, 2016 letter to Central Saanich that the flooding has been created from a combination of three things:

- approving more development – which creates more runoff water
- adjacent land owners being allowed to raise the height of their property
- poor municipal drainage planning.

Phil stated that after the on-site meetings, he hopes the sub-committee can come up with a plan. Maber Flats is a long-term issue and there has been a lot of development in the area. We need to get the full picture first.

Larry Sluggett stated:

- There has not been a good review of the technical data by PAAC.
- Engineering's site map was taken from 1970s information. The CRD has good maps available.
- The only technical work completed was by an agricultural consultant from Vancouver – and he didn't do any groundwork.
- Fieldwork needs to be carried out – there is a severe deficiency in technical evaluation. There has been no due diligence.
- The floodplain is 309 acres. The consultant's report, completed 2 years ago, noted that 85%-90% of the land could be converted into food production.
- There have been many changes since then: areas of land have been altered and a proper technical evaluation is needed because current data is outdated.

- He estimates the project could cost between \$4 and \$5 million so a proper review should be done.

Phil Christie pointed out that PAAC is just an advisory group and does not have the resources to get a technical analysis of the property. This is a municipal issue: PAAC can become well informed about the issue, but any improvements to be carried out are a municipal decision. Our goal is to help agriculture and be as knowledgeable as we can about the situation. Two pages of questions have been prepared to discuss at the on-site meeting – not technical questions, but rather questions that need to be asked.

Clayton Fox advised that no-one is jumping forward without doing more research. Central Saanich has made it clear that research will be done before they start any excavation.

Martindale Valley

Jack Mar stated regarding the Martindale Valley, water flows from the creek into the property he farms. He feels he is in conflict with discussion on this matter and vacated the Chair.

Jack Mar left the meeting and Bob Maxwell assumed the Chair

Bob Maxwell drew a diagram of the situation, noting there are many farms affected in the area, not just Jack Mar's farm. Jack's idea is to build a berm on the property at the corner of Martindale and the Pat Bay Highway to divert the water.

Discussion ensued:

- It is not known how many acres of farmland flood, or how many of those acres are critical to farming on the Peninsula, but it is a lot of money to fix the problem.
- Should we focus on getting the land that is farmable farmed rather than trying to reclaim flooded land? Draining floodplains or eco-systems is not necessarily the best environmental solution. A cost-benefit analysis should be done.
- Normally, flooding preserves the peat in the soil, and in the spring the water levels decrease so planting can start in April. It is the unusual summer water surges that wash out the crops.
- If soil and water conditions permit and farmers can plant in April, often they can get two crops off the land in a year.

Phil advised:

- There will also be a stakeholders meeting for the Martindale Valley drainage issue.
- It has been debated which issue is more important – Maber Flats or the Martindale Valley.
- The sub-committee will be looking at both issues and will not prioritize one from the other.
- Drainage plans always have to take into account what is the optimal solution; Fisheries and Oceans will be involved and invited to the stakeholders meetings.

Jack Mar returned to the meeting and re-assumed the Chair

- d) Resource Stewardship – (vacant)** – brief discussion agreed that this topic has been dormant for a number of years, and will be removed from the regular agenda until such time as a resource stewardship issue arises.
- e) Education and Outreach (Linda Geggie)** – not present

OTHER BUSINESS

Michael Doehnel asked if the issue of removing land from the ALR at the Airport has been discussed by the Commission. He was advised that while PAAC may not condone the idea of removing land from the ALR, it is under federal jurisdiction and beyond our control.

Adjournment: On a Motion from Bev Marley the meeting adjourned at 9:40 pm

Next Meeting: The next regular PAC meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, March 10, 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.

Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary