



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

Present: Jack Mar in the Chair; Phil Christie; Carol Davidson; Linda Geggie; Bev Marley; Larry Sluggett; Dianne Williamson; Councillors Weisenberger (North Saanich), and Derman (Saanich). Also present was Rob Kline, Agrologist, Ministry of Agriculture and Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Clerk.

Guests: Jane Evans, Planner, Saanich; Mike Hicks, CRD Electoral Officer, Juan de Fuca
Regrets: Councillors Graham, McLennan and Kahakauwila; Samantha Charlton; Bernadette Greene; Bob Maxwell; Terry Michell; Nikki Tate-Straton.

Minutes: Moved by Phil Christie and Seconded by Bev Marley: "That the Minutes of February 11, 2016 be adopted as circulated."

CARRIED

TREASURER'S REPORT – Samantha Chartlon – not present

SPEAKER'S BUREAU: Mike Hicks, CRD Electoral Area Director – Juan de Fuca

Proposed amendments to municipal Firearms Bylaws re hunting regulations

At the February 11, 2016 meeting, Councillor Graham advised that in order to try to address the expanding resident goose populations, Central Saanich was proposing an amendment to its Firearms Bylaw and had considered a letter from the Juan de Fuca Electoral Area Director, Mike Hicks regarding the issue. PAAC passed a Motion at the February meeting to write to member municipalities suggesting they consider similar amendments to their Firearms Bylaws. It was suggested by Phil Christie after the meeting that PAAC invite Mike Hicks to speak to the issue and provide further clarification before contacting the municipalities with the bylaw amendment suggestion.

Mr. Hicks stated:

- He sits on the CRD Parks Committee and heard it cost over \$40,000 to carry out the cull last year that killed a small number of geese.
- He understands there are over 6,000 resident geese and populations could grow to 60,000 in 10 years.
- A kill permit can be obtained from the Federal Government during hunting season, when the birds are moulting and cannot fly; he has heard that the geese don't taste very good when moulting as they don't have enough fat.
- Cannons don't work; egg addling is hit and miss, time consuming, requires trained volunteers and a permit must be obtained each time.
- Six farms within the CRD have a crop damage permit from the Canadian Wildlife Service.
- Current regulations allow farmers to obtain a permit from the municipality (with police involvement), and shoot between 5 and 10 birds a week.
- Blinds or decoys cannot be used and the birds stay where they fall – they cannot be eaten. He has talked to the Canadian Wildlife Service in Vancouver, who noted that many municipalities have banned hunting.

- After his recent interviews on C-Fax and the CBC, he expected a barrage of comments from animal lovers about the proposal to shoot more geese – but he heard nothing.
- For farmers who already have a Crop Damage Permit, why not let the same hunters increase their bag limit to 10 per day per hunter, (during hunting season, October to March), allow them to use decoys and blinds and use the goose meat for food if desired.
- The CRD Board thought this was a good idea; Sooke, Metchosin, Central Saanich and possibly Saanich will be considering it.
- He doesn't know if it will work, but if it does, there is a chance we could kill up to 2000 geese this year.
- He spoke to Ducks Unlimited and they have indicated they are willing to help the farmers.
- It is important to note this should not be wide-open hunting – it should just apply to the farmers and their nominees (hunters), who already have a crop protection permit.
- Hunting is accepted in Canada – provided the animal or bird is used for food.

Larry Sluggett noted he gets a permit every year but he is surrounded by small horse farms and his neighbours are not happy about the shooting.

Dianne Williamson stated she that while she supports the culls, she has issues with bio-security and minimum setback requirements on her poultry farm.

Bev Marley stated:

- Ducks Unlimited brought the geese here in the first place and there are 9,000 now, not 6,000.
- It wasn't the CRD that did the cull last year but rather they were part of the Goose Management Committee who worked on the egg addling programme and the cull.
- The \$40,000 for the cull was not CRD's money; it took the Committee almost 5 years to raise that amount and much of the work was carried out by volunteers.
- Regarding eating the birds, most people say they don't taste very good.
- She feels the main problem is lack of education, and understanding the rules and regulations.
- We need a public education programme to let them know what the farmers and the hunters are permitted to do.
- She doesn't want to put down the CRD but whoever is going to be in charge needs to take some action – not just push paper around. The Goose Management Strategy Committee is very frustrated with the lack of progress.
- Egg addling will only maintain the population – not reduce it.

Mr. Hicks acknowledged Bev Marley's comments, noting he is on our side.

- The Okanagan has a huge, well organized, egg addling programme which is very successful.
- He is advocating hunting on farmland with a crop damage permit to lower the population; if all municipalities adopt this change, it will gradually reduce the population to acceptable numbers.
- At this time, Sooke does not permit hunting, period.
- He feels there is public support for a goose cull; people support farming.
- What he is proposing will not entirely solve the goose issue but if we want to support our farmers, then we should not curtail their efforts to hunt geese on their properties.
- He has talked to Canadian Wildlife Service about permits for egg addling, as he thinks you should only have to get a permit once and go through the training programme once – not every time.
- He noted that at this time, goose management is not part of any CRD department's mandate. However, he is chair of the CRD Parks Committee, he wants to help with this cause and is in a position to do so.

- He noted that permits are issued at airports as well as to farmers due to major public safety issues.

Phil Christie thanked Mr. Hicks for coming to the meeting and for attempting to find solutions to this problem. He noted that Bev Marley has worked diligently on this matter for many years. Everyone's goal is to find an acceptable solution and we hope we are able to get the local municipalities on side.

Action:

It was agreed to send the letter to the member municipalities, requesting they consider amendments to their Firearms Bylaws as suggested in the January 17, 2016 letter from Mike Hicks to Central Saanich, but that the word "sustenance" be removed from the suggested amendment and encouraging a public education component.

BUSINESS ARISING – February 11, 2016

Conflict of Interest

Bob Maxwell prepared some draft information regarding conflict of interest guidelines, further to discussions at the January and February meetings regarding the ALR application for property owned by a PAAC member on West Saanich Road. Bob had asked that this matter be held for discussion until the next meeting when he is present.

CORRESPONDENCE

- a) Letter from PAAC to the Fruit Growers Association thanking them for their donation, suggesting that once they have completed disbursement of their funds, we would like to assist them with an article in the local press to note their generosity to the various community groups and organizations, and give agriculture some positive press as well.
- b) Draft letter from PAAC to member municipalities regarding proposed amendments to Firearms Bylaws with respect to goose management issues. (*see discussion above under "Speaker's Bureau"*)
- c) Letter from Central Saanich re a meeting on March 15 regarding drainage in the Martindale Valley. The stakeholders have been identified; this will include staff from Saanich, Rob Kline from the Ministry of Agriculture and staff from the Water Management Branch. (*see discussion under Agricultural Land Base below*)

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – NEW - none

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – CURRENT

- a) **Goose Management Strategy (Bev Marley/Rob Kline)**
There is a meeting scheduled for tomorrow (March 11); Bev noted she is unsure what the next steps will be, but understands 3 options will be discussed at the meeting.
- b) **Deer Management Strategy (Rob Kline)**
Rob stated he has not heard anything new regarding the deer management.

c) CRD Food Systems Strategy (Linda Geggie)

Linda stated she and Rob Kline attended a meeting recently where the new draft Strategy was distributed and discussed. After a review, it was decided the document is sufficiently complete to be sent forward to the Planning, Transportation and Protection Services Committee for review. The document is not ready for public review at this time.

In her opinion, the document is a good representation of the issues: wildlife, maintaining agricultural water rates, a regional approach to drainage issues (there are 8 key “hot spot” drainage areas), land trusts, land access, and relationship building with First Nations.

Rob Kline stated:

- In terms of a strategic document, it addresses a number of issues that PAAC has been concerned about. A section on economic development has been included also.
- Derek Messelink is the consultant, who is reporting to Jeff Weightman at the CRD.
- He is pleased with the document, which has taken 2 years to complete, and believes there will be actions coming from the strategy once approved.

d) Saanich Agricultural & Food Security Strategy – Jane Evans, Saanich Planner

- Saanich has hired Upland Agricultural Planning as the consultant to help facilitate the task force and take the lead in the project.
- In February, Council endorsed the task force, which had its first meeting on March 3, 2016.
- We discussed the process, identified stakeholders and talked about various events the task force could attend to reach the public.
- She asked PAAC to review the list of events (which she will send to the secretary) and advise if there are any missing.
- A list of questions to ask at these various events has been prepared and a survey is being prepared.
- PAAC has been identified as a stakeholder; she will keep the Commission up to date on the progress of the task force and hopefully get feedback from PAAC.
- The next step is for the task force to identify a vision and a goal, which she will bring to PAAC for comment.

AGRICULTURAL STRATEGY – SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS

a) Water (Michael Doehnel) - not present; nothing to report

b) Farm Economics (Terry Michell) – Not present; nothing to report

c) Agricultural Land Base (Phil Christie)

◆ Maber Flats

Phil stated a small sub-committee has been formed consisting of Larry Sluggett, Terry Michell, Jack Mar and himself. He has drafted a paper that is not ready for circulation to PAAC yet, but he hoped to get some feedback and see if there is support from the Commission.

The area in question is between Keating X Road and Stelly's X Road, dissected by Wallace Drive. The land is covered with water in the winter and two major farms are affected by this: Silver Rill and Larry Sluggett's farm. Historically, the Maber family farmed the area and the Fox family have also farmed it for a lot of years.

There are two main issues:

1. The current proposal for a retention pond comes from a Stormwater Management Plan done by Central Saanich that does not adequately reflect the agricultural potential of Maber Flats.
 2. The Zbeetnoff report, completed from an agricultural perspective, states that the research is not broad enough in scope to provide due diligence necessary to verify the information used in the study.
- The municipality is trying to solve the problem of excess drainage and the concern is that the process could subvert the overall process of having the ALR in the first place. It could lead to subdivision of the property for less desirable uses, such as small estates or hobby farms.
 - The sub-committee believes a more detailed study is required.
 - There are many stakeholders involved, including local farmers and landowners, developers, environmental groups.
 - Although PAAC has received presentations from individuals, as a group we have not had a good understanding of the concerns of the stakeholders.
 - Maber Flats is some 300 acres, and has lots of environmental encroachments from roads, dykes, berms, school fields; it is estimated as much as 40% of the area has encroachments of a non-agricultural nature.
 - Central Saanich has advised that the current work is a result of the Stormwater Management Plan, the Zbeetnoff report, and input from farmers and others.
 - The only decision made to date by the municipality is to buy 27 acres of the land for the detention pond and they created a budget for a detailed study. The sub-committee agrees more work is required before a detention pond is built.
 - The pond is designed to include extra capacity for extreme weather events.
 - According to the Municipal Engineer, developers in the Keating-west area are responsible for their own stormwater issues.
 - We asked about widening or cleaning ditches to address the flooding, and were told this would help somewhat, but not be as effective as a large retention pond.
 - We also raised other issues with the District, such as consideration of succession planting around the pond, encroachment of natural vegetation, and habitat for water fowl, which we were told would be considered in the detailed design stage.
 - Long-term use for the agricultural land on Maber Flats has to be considered; the sub-committee feels the Zbeetnoff report is optimistic to assume that 232 acres of the total 308 acres would be farmed.
 - There are existing road rights-of-way which interfere with efficient use of the land, and more so if the small lot subdivisions are permitted.
 - One 30-acre tract of land is already subdivided into 5-acre parcels and if access is provided they could be sold individually. This would impact future of long-term agriculture and we would like to see this issue addressed – perhaps by having further road development and servicing restricted.
 - In response to a suggestion about cleaning out Graham Creek again, last done about 25 years ago, he agreed this should be investigated, but getting access may be more difficult today.
 - Central Saanich's Agricultural Advisory Committee is opposed to the retention pond project.
 - A major concern is if the area is drained, owners of the surrounding smaller farms may sell, which in turn would cause more land filling and decrease agricultural production.
 - Cost is another major concern. Additional government funding should be confirmed.

- The District acknowledges that the Zbeetnoff report was done with a limited budget and more analysis is required.
- The sub-committee has prepared 7 recommendations for Central Saanich's consideration, summarized below:
 - Main purpose for the project should be confirmed: is it to improve agricultural production or to improve stormwater management, including surrounding land development.
 - The Ministry of Agriculture to provide input: soil surveys, engineering studies, floodplain mapping, horticultural and economic studies relating to agricultural production once drainage system is built.
 - PAAC be provided with a review of the stakeholder concerns (including farmers).
 - Confirm funding sources to ensure unnecessary burden on Central Saanich taxpayers.
 - Work with local farmers to avoid creation of conflicts caused by Canada Geese.
 - Establish restrictions on municipal infrastructure to preserve the remaining viable farmland within Maber Flats.
 - Central Saanich delay the water retention project until a thorough quantitative and qualitative analysis of the potential agricultural benefits has been done.

Rob Kline stated:

- At this time, there is no provincial infrastructure funding available.
- In response to the points raised by the sub-committee, he agreed they have hit some of the gaps.
- He would question how the surrounding farmers could connect into the proposed new drainage system. They have been told that drainage and water control on their farms will be improved by connecting into the system.
- If all the farmers were to connect, how would that influx of water be managed?
- It sounds very tenuous: while there could be a benefit to the farming community, he doesn't see any hard numbers. There needs to be more due diligence.
- A lot of details need to be flushed out.

Larry Sluggett noted the Central Saanich website states the purpose is to improve agricultural drainage and productivity. The only report done to identify the benefits is the Zbeetnoff report – already acknowledged not to be thorough enough.

Bev Marley stated there are many productive 5-acre farms. You can legislate farmland – but you cannot legislate farmers. Even if there are sports fields instead of active farming, it retains the greenspace and prevents subdivision. The land can always be reclaimed for agriculture. Sometimes we can drain too much water from the land; what crops are proposed should be determined first so we don't end up having to irrigate.

Phil Christie stated:

- He is not necessarily opposed to 5-acre parcels; he just wants people to understand the situation.
- Small farms are important and can be productive. It is the additional infrastructure required for the smaller lots that concerns him.
- This is why he has options for PAAC to consider:
 1. Take the hard line position to support large scale agriculture; or
 2. Take the softer approach, and work with the District to ensure agriculture, small and large scale, is being supported.
 3. Oppose the development of any retention pond.

- He suggested we provide the draft report to Central Saanich, saying we are prepared to work with them further on the project. It would be ideal if these recommendations were included in the Terms of Reference for the plan.

Larry Sluggett suggested another sub-committee meeting be held to clean up the document and identify clear priorities. PAAC's purpose is to support agriculture: is this current proposal a good thing for agriculture or not? PAAC does not have the financial resources to do any technical work; that is the municipality's responsibility.

Linda Geggie thanked Phil and the sub-committee for the work they have put into this.

- She suggested when presenting the options, it should be recommended the agricultural productivity for the future of the land be considered and that this has to be front and centre of the decision.
- The first option is not hard line from this Commission's perspective. We don't have many large tracts of land left on the Peninsula and as soon as you start opening it up to subdivision, you loose land to infrastructure on each lot.
- Anything we can do to stop land from being fragmented the better.
- She supports small-lot agriculture but we also need the larger tracts of land.

MOTION: Moved by Phil Christie and Seconded by Carol Davidson: "That a revised draft be circulated to PAAC members for review with comments to be received in a timely manner, further amendments if required by the Land Base Sub-committee, and then forwarded the document to Central Saanich for consideration."

CARRIED

d) Education and Outreach – Linda Geggie

- The Farmer to Farmer workshop was very successful with about 200 attendees. 175 of these were from the farming community. This year there were more people from up-Island and the mainland.
- One of the interesting things discussed was about a voice for the farming community, and ways to get a more coherent voice in the future.

LATE ITEM

First Nations Initiative – Shellfish Harvesting

A request from Erich Nahser-Ringer, Aboriginal Relations, CRD, was received asking that a member of the Commission attend a meeting on March 18 at the Tsartlip First Nations regarding an initiative with the WSANEC First Nations regarding shellfish harvesting.

It would involved identifying shellfish resources, looking at monitoring gaps where they exist and the possible restoration of sites. They are reaching out to PAAC because agriculture has a role to play in the health of the waterways that feed into the ocean shoreline.

Jack Mar offered to attend at PAAC's representative.

OTHER BUSINESS

Rob Kline announced that this would be his last PAAC meeting as a Ministry employee as he is retiring this month. He advised that Wayne Haddow is also retiring. In response to a question about whether his position will be filled, he noted there are currently two vacant positions for regional astrologists, one here and another in the interior. It is likely that only one of these positions will be filled – he is not sure which one.

Rob was thanked sincerely for the support he has shown and the expert assistance he has provided to PAAC and its endeavors over the years.

Adjournment: On a Motion from Bev Marley the meeting adjourned at 9:20 pm

Next Meeting: The next regular PAC meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, April 14, 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.
