



**MINUTES OF THE
PENINSULA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION**
Council Chambers, Saanich Municipal Hall
THURSDAY, JUNE 9, 2016 AT 6:30 PM

Present: Bob Maxwell the Chair; Carol Davidson; Phil Christie; Linda Geggie; Bernadette Green; Jack Mar; Terry Michell; Larry Sluggett; Dianne Williamson; Councillor Weisenberger (N.Saanich). Also present was Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Clerk.

Guests: Jane Evans & Cam Scott, Planners, Saanich; Bruce Greig, C. Saanich Planner; Ray Baker;
Regrets: Councillors Derman, McLennan, Graham and Kahakauwila; Bev Marley; Sam Charlton.

Agenda: Moved by Larry Sluggett and Seconded by Jack Mar: "That the following items be added to the Agenda: Hunt Road ALR subdivision (discussed at the May 12 meeting); Deposit of Fill operation on Old East Road (discussed at the April 14 meeting)."

Carried

Minutes: Moved by Larry Sluggett and Seconded by Dianne Williamson "That the Minutes of May 12, 2016 be adopted, with a change to the first paragraph on page 5 regarding Farm Worker Housing, deleting the reference to farm worker housing on Pendray Farms."

CARRIED

**Special Meeting to discuss Saanich Agriculture Food Security Plan
– Jane Evans and Cam Scott**

Jane stated the recent public open house had about 40 attendees and good input was received. A survey is posted on line at www.saanich.ca and she hoped PAAC members would participate. Although this is a Saanich strategy, input from the region is welcomed as there are no boundaries for agriculture.

A list of strengths, opportunities, challenges and threats that affect farming and food security in Saanich identified by the task force was distributed. A list of issues previously discussed by PAAC over the past 6 years was displayed and Jane asked PAAC to identify a few of the key items they think should be addressed in the Food Security Plan.

Through discussions with Bruce Greig from Central Saanich she is aware that municipality went through a similar process a few years ago. She is looking for the priorities; a long list of issues has been identified and obviously they can't all be addressed at the one time. She understands there are other agricultural-based groups and maybe we could partner with them or share knowledge.

Discussion ensued and the following points were noted by the Commission members:

Non-Farm Uses on Agricultural Lands: typical uses could be weddings, haunted houses, activities and train rides for children, distilleries, breweries.

- Understood that the goal of agricultural land is to grow food, but sometimes farmers have to augment their income with agri-tourism; this can be a good thing.
- Provincial regulations allow a broader use of ALR lands for breweries or distilleries, but it is not desirable to use large tracts of ALR land for this particular use.
- Urban communities support the ALR, often because they enjoy the open space associated with farming.
- While no-one is against a farmer making a profit, food security is a long-time concern on Vancouver Island and we need to find a way for these "non-farm" uses to co-exist in a reasonable fashion.

Equestrian Uses - discussion noted that the horse community on Vancouver Island, and in particular the Peninsula where there are an estimated 5,000 horses, is an important part of agriculture.

- This requires large quantities of hay but for the farmer this is not an economic crop: bulk lime is hard to acquire, equipment has to be maintained (there is no John Deere rep on the Island).
- Farmers grow hay for crop rotation purposes; Michells produces up to 25,000 bales each year and people are willing to pay for good hay.

Farm Succession – Where are the new farmers coming from? Strategies will have to be developed to encourage young farmers and make it possible for them to earn a living given the high cost of agricultural land today.

- It was pointed out that young people have never been able to buy farmland: It has always been a valuable commodity. Unless passed down through family, most people get farmland when they are over 50 years old and have more financial stability.
- People sell valuable real estate in Vancouver and move to the Island, buy a small plot of farmland and want to adopt a certain lifestyle. A concern is that large tracts of land are being purchased for an “estate” and not necessarily to farm – however, it is keeping the area green.
- Noted over 200 young people attended the Farmer2Farmer workshop this spring. They are eager to farm.

Composting – Saanich's green bin programme ships the material to Cobble Hill rather than composting it locally.

- There is a huge shortage of organic matter on agricultural lands.
- What happens to the compost from Cobble Hill?
- If composting is done correctly, there should be no issues; it must be possible to find a location and use the right process so the compost can be used where it is vitally needed.
- Urban areas need to work harder at composting programmes.
- Compost should be available to the farmers and the general public.
- Michell Farms composts some of the material from Cobble Hill and puts it back on their fields.
- Firbank Farm, the last major poultry farm on the Peninsula, has over 1000 birds. A 100 x 30 shed with a cement floor to stop leaching stores the manure. The farm uses the manure on its fields and sells some, but it costs money to build the shed and to process the manure.
- Although it may be more cost-effective to buy chemical fertilizers, it is not sustainable. Soils do not produce if they are not replenished with organic matter.

Food processing – This can be very expensive as farmers have to meet regulations and the produce has to be stored properly.

- When North Saanich prepared its Economic Development Strategy, this was one of the key issues.
- A proposal was made to have a commercial kitchen to process food, as well as cool storage available.
- It has been rumored there will be a processing plant in Central Saanich.
- Local producers are competing with California; however lately import prices have been lower.

In response to a question from Cam Scott about whether there is anything Saanich could do differently to encourage agricultural production, the following comments were noted:

- Galey Farms is the biggest grower in Saanich; Ray Galey has stated repeatedly the trouble he has retaining farm laborers due to lack of affordable housing. Saanich needs to look at changing its regulations regarding Farm Worker Housing.
- Municipalities should not make a big issue about what is going to happen to the housing in the off-season, and be more flexible. What is the downside to renting out the space to someone who needs it?
- There needs to be a long-term task force where people can thoroughly discuss this issue, and others, and to determine if there are bylaw or policy changes required.

- Noted that many of the 20 items on the list presented here have been discussed again and again at PAAC meetings – such as the wildlife problems, farm worker housing, lack of a regional agrologist, composting, deposit of fill, etc. Letters are written to Councils and MLAs and MPs, reports are drafted and submitted, perhaps “received” at a council meeting, but nothing happens.
- The Politicians need to understand the big picture – one of the reasons we hold our farm tours enervvery few years.
- The Municipalities should work together, pool resources, and act on solutions.
- Farmers have had enough lip service; we need boots on the ground (eg: a local agrologist) to assist them.

Regional Agrologist – There is an urgent need for this position to be filled again in the region. Rob Kline retired a few months ago and we have heard his position will not be replaced. An idea was discussed at a PAAC meeting for the municipalities to pitch in to cover the cost of hiring an agrologist – but this is a provincial responsibility. An agrologist could be part of the task force and would help to move things forward.

Water Rates – Water use for agriculture has always been a big issue. In this area there is often a surplus of water in the winter and a deficiency in the summer.

- We are not the same as California. We need to be more intelligent about how we manage our water: there is the politically correct way and the correct way. We have a huge reservoir and people are very conscious about water use these days – increased water conservation has led to increased residential water rates in order to support the infrastructure.
- Most people are not aware that agriculture only uses 2% of CRD water; most irrigation comes from wells and holding ponds.
- Noted the province is considering new water regulations to control wells, which will require wells to be registered, and you will also need a water licence and a flow meter for your well.
- The agricultural rate has not been raised for quite a few years, but there are no guarantees.
- It is better to use more water in the agricultural sector than for residential use such as lawn watering.

Stormwater Management – Many areas, such as McHugh Ditch and the Martindale Valley, cross municipal boundaries. Municipalities need to work together to find solutions to the flooding problems that occur year after year which lead to crop loss or farmers being unable to access the fields in the early spring due to over-wet conditions.

Panama Flats – Saanich bought this property a few years ago and it has just been sitting there – it has not been put out for tender and money is being spent to continually cut down weeds. This land could be farmed productively. Rithet's Bog and Quick's Bottom are a couple of other areas that could be farmed.

THE REGULAR PAAC MEETING CONTINUED AT 7:45 P.M.

TREASURER'S REPORT – Samantha Chartlon – not present

CORRESPONDENCE

- a) PAAC letter and Resolution regarding proposed changes to the Migratory Bird Act in order to address resident Canada Goose problem, was sent to Central Saanich, with copies to all member municipalities, MLA's, MP's and Minister of Agriculture, Regional Wildlife Biologist and the CRD.

No response had been received at the time of the meeting, but it was later reported that Central Saanich Council agreed to forward the Resolution to the UBCM for consideration this fall.

- b) PAAC letter to Saanich's CAO requesting that the Terms of Reference for Saanich's Agricultural Food Security Plan be expanded to consider Farm Worker Housing.

No response had been received at the time of the meeting but it was later reported that the request was approved.

BUSINESS ARISING – MAY 12, 2016

Saanich Fair 2016 – General Discussion – Linda Geggie

- Saanich Fair is PAAC's major out-reach to the public each year, although we did have the Farm Tour last year, another education-type event geared to the municipal politicians and staff.
- The objective of having a booth at the fair is to educate the public about agriculture, increase awareness and profile the work of PAAC.
- There are a number of ways we can do this and many topics to choose from – such as wildlife problems (geese, deer, etc). But do people want this kind of format – should it be “more fun”. Should we change it up this year?
- This year's theme for the Saanich Fair is eggs.
- As usual, we will partner again with CR-Fair and the DFMA, sharing tent space.
- The zucchini races are a great hit with the youngsters and are a big draw – parents can chat with volunteers and look at display items while the kids are busy.

Information Tent

- The information tent where we have had 3 or 4 speakers and/or demonstrations each day is perhaps not the right format for the fair.
- The location is remote from the PAAC booth and if we do this again this year, definitely need to increase the advertising of the event to make people aware. Perhaps a large white board at the PAAC booth noting that day's schedule so changes can be made if necessary.
- It is a costly venture as we pay for the speakers (average \$60 per person) and the microphone (\$100) over the 3 days. Perhaps this money could be better spent.
- Jack Mar offered to conduct a workshop on growing tips for urban gardeners.
- Noted it was important for the “urbanites” to fully understand the serious issues surrounding the expanding goose population – but again – is the Fair the right venue for this?

Paid assistant from CR-Fair

- All agreed the paid “volunteer” from CR-Fair was very helpful, providing continuity throughout the day and it was good to know someone would be during during the hours the tent is “open” - usually from 10:00 a.m to 5:00 pm.
- Definite yes to do the same this year.

Recipe Booklets

- Bev and Dianne worked on a squash recipe pamphlet that was very popular and tied in well with the great squash display.
- Agreed we should do something similar this year or even reprint last year's brochure.

Games & Activities

- The seed matching game is popular. Perhaps this year as the fair's theme is eggs, we could get sample eggs of various sizes – from quails, chickens, turkeys, ducks, etc. as a guessing game.
- The mystery box guessing game is always a hit as well with the kids.

- Retain the zucchini races – increase supplies.
- Good to have a couple more activities for kids and adults.

Video Loop

- Suggested we could have a video loop in the tent illustrating the history of farming on the Peninsula – which hopefully PAAC will formalize in the proposed Agricultural History Book.
- Have two or three photo panels with then and now photos of agriculture on the Peninsula which could cover many areas from stormwater, pests, farm worker housing, farm economics, etc. “A walk thru time”.
- A photo is worth a 1000 words – people don't want to take the time to read lots of information – they are at the fair for a fun day. Other formats, such as the Farmer2Farmer is the venue for more “education” type settings.
- Central Saanich was part of Saanich about 60 years ago and the Saanich Archives has some interesting photos; Isobel will check if we can get copies made.
- Perhaps rather than spend money on speakers, we could invest in some folding panels that could be used for many years at events.

Linda will be in touch and asked members to let her know if they are interested in participating in the planning for the Fair.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: NEW - none

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – CURRENT

- a) **Goose Management Strategy (Bev Marley)** – nothing new to report other than the Resolution proposed by PAAC has been approved by Central Saanich and will be forwarded to the UBCM this fall.
 - b) **Deer Management Strategy** - discussion noted there does not seem to be as many deer. Nothing to report on the Deer Strategy.
- χ) **CRD Food Systems Strategy (Linda Geggie)**
 Considered at the CRD's Planning, Transportation and Protected Services Committee on May 18, 2016. Terry Michell and Bob Maxwell were present. It was recommended that the Strategy be forwarded to the CRD Board for consideration in July.
- δ) **6187 Hunt Road (Fatt Family) – ALR Subdivision**
 Discussed that the May meeting and PAAC members concluded that as there was no net loss to agriculture, and although there were a few concerns, they did not have any serious objections to the subdivision of a portion of the property to provide for a home site for Mrs. Fatt senior.

Larry Sluggett asked that the matter be reconsidered as he understands that Saanich Council plans to support the subdivision proposal and he disagrees for two reasons: The house in question that will sit within the subdivided parcel is not designated heritage and he feels approving the application will set a

precedent for other farms to request subdivision if they have an old house on their property that is not designated.

Jane Evans pointed out that the house is on the heritage registry and it is up to the owner of the property to request heritage designation. She understands that the Fatt family intends to apply for designation. She noted that the house is in the corner of the property, making it easier to subdivide a portion of the property from the main lot, rather than if the house were in the centre of the property. She also stated that the family likely will sell the property once the mother passes away.

General discussion ensued noting the following points:

- Why does it have to be subdivided? Could the property not be rezoned to allow two dwellings on the one property?
- It was doubtful that the ALC will support the application.
- Family home site severance would not be permitted as the family has not owned this property since 1972, although it was acknowledged throughout the farming community that the Fatts are long-time farmers and have done a lot for agriculture.
- There was some agreement that approving the application could set a precedent.
- If the subdivision is approved, is there any way to ensure the house won't be demolished and the one acre parcel sold and subdivided into even smaller lots?

It was understood that the Report to Council has been prepared; however, the Secretary will submit these additional comments to Neil Findlow in the Saanich Planning Department for his consideration.

e) Old East Road – Illegal Dumping of Fill

According to Saanich Bylaw Enforcement, the permit has not been approved to date. Neighbours are advised to report any dumping activity to the Bylaw Enforcement Department.

AGRICULTURAL STRATEGY – SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS

a) Water (Michael Doehnel) - not present;

b) Farm Economics (Terry Michell/Larry Sluggett)

- Strawberries were very early this year and there is an abundance of them throughout the Peninsula.
- Raspberries should be ready by next week – again an early crop.
- Many other items are being harvested early due to the warm weather and planting is still taking place.
- A first good hay crop has been harvested.
- Prices are similar to last year; berry prices are a little lower due to the volumes.
- Corn should be ready by the first week in July and it should be an excellent crop.

Larry Sluggett noted he is having trouble with geese noting he has over 50 goslings and his crops are 20% less. They have tried addling but it is difficult to find the eggs. Another farmer had hundreds of geese land in his barley fields (60-70 acres); the birds were chased out, but were back 20 minutes later.

Possible Change in Logo for Local Produce

Linda Geggie asked if anyone was interested in taking part in discussions about branding and logos for Vancouver Island produce to let her know. Discussions are underway to consider a new logo. The Island Farms Rooster is well known but hasn't been used for a while – do we want to continue to use this logo or not?

Terry Michell noted he used to use the Rooster logo on his produce but doesn't any more. He advised the logo has not been part Co-op discussions for about 10 years. It cost a lot of money to keep the Rooster on a product, so the co-op opted out.

Discussion noted that people often buy direct from the farm they know the product is local; in a grocery store people would recognize the logo on local produce.

c) Agricultural Land Base (Phil Christie)

- ◆ **Maber Flats** – No response has been received from Central Saanich to date.
- ◆ **Martindale Flats** – nothing to report

Noted a joint Council meeting between Central Saanich and Saanich is proposed for June 21, 2016. Discussion topics have not been decided, but these two drainage issues and replacement of our Regional Agrologist could provide good discussion.

Education and Outreach – Linda Geggie - see discussion above re Saanich Fair

OTHER BUSINESS

Agricultural History Book – Carry to September Meeting

Adjournment: On a Motion from Linda Geggie the meeting adjourned at 9:05 pm
 Next Meeting: The next regular PAC meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, September 8, 2016.**

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