



**MINUTES OF THE  
PENINSULA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION  
Council Chambers, Saanich Municipal Hall  
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2016 AT 7:30 PM**

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**Present:** Jack Mar in the Chair; Carol Davidson; Linda Geggie; Bernadette Green; Bev Marley; Bob Maxwell; Terry Michell; Dianne Williamson; Councillor Derman (Saanich) Also present was Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Clerk.

**Guests:** Jane Evans Saanich Planner; Keeley Nixon, CR-Fair; Lindsay Dault, Bee Keeper; Nathalie and David Chambers, Madrona Farm; Mike Doehnel; Russ Taylor, Fox Farms; Kyle & Jennifer Michell; Clint Megaffin.

**Regrets:** Councillors McLennan, Graham, Weisenberger and Kahakauwila; Sam Charlton, Phil Christie, Larry Sluggett.

**Agenda:** Moved by Bev Marley and Seconded by Dianne Williamson: "That the Agenda be amended to add the following items: Provincial Wildlife issues and information from Farmland Trust re proposed Winter Lecture Series for young farmers."

Carried

**Minutes:** Moved by Bernadette Green and Seconded by Bev Marley: "That the Minutes of October 13, 2016 be approved as circulated."

Carried

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**TREASURER'S REPORT** – Samantha Chartlon - not present

**SPEAKER'S BUREAU** – Lindsay Dault, Bee Keeping.

Lindsay stated:

- She previously worked in Vancouver with a small group of bee keepers, moved to the Island in the spring and started 50 hives. She noticed a severe lack of food for the bees and low pollinators from the Peninsula out as far as Sooke.
- The honey bee population is very important: without them we do not have certain birds or plants.
- There are plenty of hay fields on the Peninsula but unfortunately while they are good for the cows and horses, they do not provide a source of real food for the bees.
- She suggested farmers could be asked to plant cover crops for the bees and other pollinators.
- The Ministry of Agriculture is implementing a pollinator project next week using open areas such as school grounds to grow pollinator-type plants to help with the bio-diversity.
- Perimeter or boulevard plantings could also be done and she asked if PAAC could promote this concept with the local municipalities.
- Although they are essential, bees are not considered livestock and according to the ALR regulations, growing borage to feed bees would not be a means to get or keep farm status.
- Horses are considered livestock so a farmer can grow hay and get farm status.

PAAC discussion noted:

- It takes one acre of wild flowers to feed one beehive. This would mean we need at least 200 acres of borage and wildflowers throughout the Peninsula to support the bee population.
- We are losing lots of pollinators throughout the area, and the population gets smaller each year.

- Suggested PAAC write to the ALC recommending that borage be recognized as an acceptable crop for beekeepers that would allow them to claim farm status, as well as having bees considered as livestock.
- Cover crops are one of the most vital and important crops you can grow. Madrona Farms plants a high volume of cover crops. Nathalie Chambers indicated she would forward list of the best plants and cover crops to grow. This list could be posted on our web page, and other sites, to educate the public.
- The public needs to be educated about the importance of growing flowers and plants to attract and feed bees.
- Noted that plantings in schools and boulevards could present a risk to some people, including young children, of being stung.
- Having a Bee Forage workshop at the Farmer2Farmer event was suggested.
- Farmers plant hay because it provides a good income. Wildflowers don't provide income, but are vital to the bee populations.
- A brief discussion took place on the BCAA regulations for farm status, which were reviewed a number of years ago, noting for beekeepers only the square footage under the hive was considered when calculating the area for farm status. The province needs to be made aware that bees are critical livestock and there should be a way to incorporate this into the farmland status equation.

### **Farmland Access Project – Keeley Nixon, CR-Fair**

Keeley stated:

- She has been a farmer in the Sooke area for over 10 years and works with CR-Fair on the Farmland Access Project, as well as other non-profits such as Linking Land and Farmers; she sees the impacts of land access to existing and prospective farmers and landowners.
- She noted that PAAC has talked about land access at past meetings and heard a presentation on the subject from Jessica Dennis, CR-Fair. Part of the strategy was to increase farmland stewardship and access to farmlands; work is continuing on this strategy using existing successful models.
- Strong indicators demonstrate there are people with agricultural skills that need land to farm and that a land trust is a viable model that can be developed to benefit new, current and outgoing farmers.
- There is some concern that land trusts could be viewed as a threat to the current market value of farmland owned by existing farms; but there is a need for farm transfer options – outside of traditional succession from one generation to the next – to see farmland continue in perpetuity.
- It is also recognized that farmland can cost up to \$100,000/acre making land ownership difficult for young farmers.
- She asked PAAC to consider creating a statement of support to recognize that the creation of a land bank is one strategy to address land tenure, and to endorse the exploration of implementing a land bank to be held in trust by the municipalities to promote farmland stewardship in the region.
- She welcomes questions and feedback at any time and would love to see alignment of our organizations on this issue.

Councillor Derman stated this topic has been discussed by Saanich Council on previous occasions and Saanich Planning is looking at developing an Agricultural Strategy.

- Council meetings now allow for groups to make a 10 minute presentation and he thinks this would be an option here.

- Farmland succession will involve a number of groups – Farmland Trust is one of them.
- He noted that CR-Fair could become involved in the planning for Panama Flats.

In response to questions from PAAC, Keeley noted that she has an inventory of lands that could be available and agreed that Haliburton Farms is an amazing model to show how providing access for young farmers can be successful.

The Chair noted that Sandown in North Saanich is another large tract of agricultural land that will be available eventually. Most of the soil on Panama Flats is good organic matter. An area near the Sooke Flats could also be brought back to life again.

**MOTION: Moved by Bob Maxwell and Seconded by Bev Marley: “That PAAC provide a statement as requested to support the CR-Fair Farmland Access Project, noting that this is an option worth exploring for the Capital Region.”**

**CARRIED**

Keeley indicated she would come back to PAAC from time to time and provide an update.

### **Non-Farm Uses in the Blenkinsop Valley – Nathalie Chambers**

Nathalie stated:

- She lives and farms in the Blenkinsop Valley.
- There have been many things that inflate the price of farmland, including industrial non-permitted uses.
- Another obstacle to food security is that the increasing industrial uses on farmland compact the soils and pollute the water.
- Blenkinsop Valley is not a freeway, or a parking lot or a garbage dump: it is a gem and she is very nervous about what is happening.
- In 1977, the Valley was designated as an agricultural and ecological greenway in perpetuity but she has noted 9 “parking lots” where heavy industrial vehicles are parked. You can see this by looking at the CRD's web maps.
- The ALR was decimated in 2014. Saanich's Urban Containment Boundary is a visionary tool and Saanich agrees that the Valley is a gem and it was designated and protected with zoning.
- We have a Local Area Plan that restricts industrial vehicles over 1200 kg entering the Valley, unless it is a local delivery. This is not being enforced.
- Capital City Tree Services bought the property next door to Madrona Farms. They have four large vehicles and have built a high fence. This type of business is a non-permitted use in the ALR but because the property is under two acres the ALC will not do anything about it.
- Other non-permitted businesses in the area encourage a high volume of trucks coming from the Keating Industrial area. The police have started to monitor the vehicles.
- She is asking PAAC to help with this problem. She cannot take the time to talk to Council or staff in bylaw enforcement or business licence all the time to get this dealt with. Complaints won't be accepted unless she gives her name, and she doesn't want to cause more trouble with her neighbours.
- David Chambers stated he sits on Saanich's Food Security Task Force; one of the things to be addressed is to streamline the complaint process.
- It seems the motto in Saanich is to beg for forgiveness rather than ask for permission.
  - Before we talk about farmland trusts we have to get this sorted out, get the parking lots dismantled and enforce the current bylaws in Saanich.

Councillor Derman stated he was aware of these issues and discussed it with the Saanich CAO a few months ago. He will follow up on this early next week.

Discussion noted that the issues mentioned are not unique to Saanich – it is in every municipality.

In response to questions, Nathalie stated:

- The Blenkinsop Valley Community Association still exists and she has asked them to help and write a letter to Council.
- She is currently collecting signatures on a petition to get the overweight vehicles removed.
- According to the bylaws, vehicles used for a home-based business have a weight limit of 4,500 kgs. The limit for trucks on Blenkinsop Road is 12,000 kgs.
- The non-permitted uses are getting in the way of the permitted uses; she can no longer farm her front field due to flooding and she has had no luck with the ALC (*it was pointed out that the ALC has no jurisdiction over properties under two acres*).

David Chambers stated:

- Soil removal is another big issue: dump trucks going back and forth removing the soil. Calls to Saanich and the ALC have not been returned.

**MOTION: Moved by Linda Geggie and Seconded by Carol Davidson: “That it is acknowledged that farmland is a precious commodity and PAAC’s mandate is to promote the viability of farmlands today and in the future, including the Blenkinsop Valley and other rural areas of Saanich. PAAC is concerned about the non-farm uses occurring the Blenkinsop Valley and the apparent infractions and non-compliance with bylaws and business licenses taking place. We respectfully ask that Saanich Council and staff look into this matter as soon as possible.”**

**CARRIED**

## **CORRESPONDENCE**

- PAAC sent a response to the Fox Family regarding their letter about Maber Flats. No acknowledgment or comment has been received although Russ Taylor was present at the meeting.

## **AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: NEW**

### **◆ PAAC Historical Agriculture and Food Project – Linda Geggie**

Both Linda and Isobel have been unable to reach Alex, the UVIC student who is working on the project. Jack Mar advised he has not yet been contacted regarding interviews. Isobel provided Alex with a copy of the photos to use for the project and other information. He had indicated at the October meeting he would have some information ready for this meeting. Linda will follow up.

### **◆ Bee Habitat Programme on the Peninsula: (see earlier discussion under Speakers' Bureau)**

- Bob Maxwell stated as we have already heard tonight, the bees are starving, both honey bees and mason bees.
- Municipalities are asking what can be done about it. One suggesting is instead of growing just grass on the road edges and boulevards, a pilot project could be initiated to grow clover, borage or wildflowers. California Poppies and lupines were also suggested.
- Wildflowers are self-seeding. Delta has a programme where farmers sow wildflowers on a portion of their farm.
- Jack Mar noted he has an 18' wide parcel that is 150' long just outside of the farm property with wild clover growing. He planted broad beans there this year and got a much better crop.

**MOTION: Moved by Bev Marley and Seconded by Linda Geggie: "That PAAC send a letter to the sponsoring municipalities requesting we work together regarding roadside plantings that would be beneficial to bees."**

**CARRIED**

◆ **Winter Lecture Sessions for Young Farmers:**

Bob Maxwell prepared some discussion points and ideas on the proposed lecture series as follows:

- Municipalities could be involved;
- Farmland Trust has indicated they would like to participate;
- Other groups to assist could be the DFMA and the Young Agrarians;
- Many organizations have senior people on their committees and boards; we could encourage younger farmers to apply for such positions – teaching sessions on how to run a meeting and parliamentary procedures;
- As well, provide information on how to work effectively with local municipalities;
- Sessions on how to be an effective, cooperative neighbour, get along with the farming community.
- Have sessions with guest speakers on drainage, irrigation, soil fertility and management, crop selection, farm business management, composting, groundwater resources and management, marketing, etc.

Discussion ensued:

- There are young people getting involved with farming today – and they are going to be the ones to carry farming along for the next 30 or 40 years.
- Some of the suggested topics could be included in the Farmer2Farmer workshops.
- Members thought the lecture series was a good idea, and getting other groups, such as Farmland Trust, the municipalities and the DFMA involved was worth pursuing.
- There are many professionals and experts that could help with workshop sessions.
- A member thought we should be cautious on how information is presented to young farmers; the younger generation may find lectures intimidating.
- However, it was also noted that many young people are asking to participate in the Farmer2Farmer workshops.
- Farming is a business, ALR rules have to be followed, budgets set, etc. Linda advised that some of the Farmer2Farmer sessions cover this type of information.
- Washington State University has a Cattleman's Winter School which involves local experts and farmers; topics cover everything from farm economics and accounting to what crops to grow, irrigation, fertilizers, composting, etc. Basically anything to do with raising cattle. 15

sessions are offered, 3 at a time with 5 sets of sessions. It was very successful. Perhaps a similar format could be considered here.

- As farmers head into retirement, they could become mentors to young farmers.
- Linda advised she will look into the concept of a lecture series with CR-Fair.

Other groups and organizations to help, in addition to the already mentioned Farmland Trust, DFMA, municipalities and Young Agrarians could be Camosun, UVIC, Royal Roads (who are assisting with some of the Farmer2Farmer sessions), and the Horticultural Centre of the Pacific.

- Keeley Nixon expressed an interest in helping.
- Clint Megaffin noted that the University of Saskatchewan has a "Farming 101" course. Perhaps skype presentations could be arranged with the University – and also UBC.

A number of the young farmers attending tonight's PAAC meeting indicated an interest in attending such workshops and lectures. Bob Maxwell collected their contact information. It was agreed to try and arrange the first session for the 3<sup>rd</sup> week in January.

Information was circulated about two upcoming workshops:

- November 17 was the Good Food Summit organized by CR-Fair
- November 28 was an all day workshop on Water Management and Farm Water Planning, organized by the CRD.

## **AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – CURRENT**

### **a) Goose Management Strategy (Bev Marley)**

Bev stated there was nothing to report. The CRD tried to arrange a meeting a few weeks ago. There is some funding left which could be used to help with egg addling. Regarding the comments made last month about the "successful" cull in the Nanaimo area compared to the one on the Peninsula, she noted we were only permitted on private land adjacent to water.

Jack Mar advised that provincial reps from Wildlife & Crop Insurance visited Michell Farms recently asking about the problems farmers are experiencing. Terry told them about the geese and deer issues as well as the drainage and flooding concerns.

Jack received a call a couple of days ago advising there could be 60% funding from the federal government to assist farmers. There is money available and they want a non-profit organization to funnel the money through.

Jack suggested this might be something PAAC could assist with but others thought it might be better to use the Direct Farm Marketing Association instead. They are holding their AGM next week. Danny Ponchett, Larry Sluggett, Jack Mar and Terry Michell are members. Another suggestion was using the Vegetable Coop Association.

### **b) CRD Food Systems Strategy (Linda Geggie)**

Linda stated the Strategy will be presented to the Planning and Protective Services Committee on November 23 before it is passed on to the CRD Board.

**c) Saanich Agriculture & Food Security Plan (Jane Evans)**

Jane stated:

- Another public open house and a workshop will be held January 18 or 19. She will send PAAC an update report on the Plan to date. She hoped PAAC will be able to help spread the word about the open house.

**d) Shellfish Harvesting Committee Update (Jack Mar) – No further meetings held****Information for the PAAC Webpage – [www.saanich.ca/living/afs/index.html](http://www.saanich.ca/living/afs/index.html)**

Jane will put information from CR-Fair on the webpage re the November 17 Good Food Summit. She reminded members if there is anything else to post, let her know.

**AGRICULTURAL STRATEGY – SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS****a) Water (Michael Doehnel)**

Michael provided his annual update on farm water usage, noting that the stats are usually a year behind.

- At the October meeting of the Regional Water Supply Commission it was agreed to leave the agricultural rate at 21.05 cents per cubic meter, as it has been for the past three years.
- The average residential rate varies from 1.80 in the western communities to 1.40 in Central and North Saanich.
- Currently, the budget for next year is at least \$1.2 m. In 2011, the budget was \$800,000. This indicates the Commission may have to think about adjusting current funding formulas or other mechanisms to ensure water is going to the people they feel it should go to.
- Anyone with farm status can access the farm water rate – either the agricultural rate or the agricultural/residential rate.
- Options have been discussed about using dedicated agricultural meters – and you would need these to get the farm rate. The lower rate could apply to food production or horticulture.
- The CRD has struck a sub-committee to deal with the issue of dedicated meters in 2017. Cost to install one of these meters could vary between \$3,000 and \$6,000.
- Currently, Central Saanich has 294 agricultural/residential accounts and only 51 dedicated agricultural accounts. In Saanich, there are 75 agricultural/residential accounts and 51 agricultural accounts. North Saanich has 106 ag/res accounts and 14 agricultural.
- While he doesn't have information on the total amount of 2016 water sales, he noted that agriculture uses only about 2% of the total volume. Approximately 8% of our water disappears through leaky pipes, line flushing and other uses.
- The cost (wholesale rate) to produce a cubic metre of water is between 50 – 60 cents.
- Municipalities buy at the wholesale rate and then mark it up to sell to their customers.
- He suggested that the whole structure of the farm rate could be revisited in the near future.
- In answer to a question about different type of agricultural rates, he advised that the Water Advisory Commission talked about providing a lower rate for food production, but not necessarily for shrubs.

**b) Farm Economics (Terry Michell/Larry Sluggett)**

Terry stated:

- Due to the dry spring and a hot June, a lot of water has been used but the weather resulted in an excellent berry crop.
- Vegetable prices have been stable but are down about 20% from last year.
- Export sales are doing very well, mostly to the mainland and the Calgary area.
- We had a very wet October and crops were lost in the Martindale Valley on Jack Mar's farm as well as Michell's.
- Grains did very well. Mike Doehnel noted that he has had the highest crop of grains ever this year.

**c) Agricultural Land Base (Phil Christie - not present)**

Maber Flats:

Max stated that a meeting was held with Central Saanich staff, the consultant – Aquatex, Jack Mar, Larry Sluggett and himself. We didn't get into specifics about what they plan to do because they are still gathering information. A key element with respect to monitoring the water table level is that portions of Maber Flats have not been farmed for decades. Peat levels vary depending on usage, amount of fill, water levels, and whether the land has been rototilled. Elevations are different and the contour lines are too close on the maps and need to be adjusted. They did take PAAC comments into consideration and seemed to be pleased we were there.

**d) Education and Outreach – Linda Geggie**

Linda stated:

CR-Fair is hosting the Good Food Summit next Thursday, November 15. Cost is \$15. The intent is to increase amount of local food production to ensure everyone has access to good food. Lunch will be provided and there will be afternoon workshops – some of the topics will include storage and distribution problems. Whole Foods and Thrifty Foods will be participating as they want to buy more local foods.

She reminded everyone about the Farmer2Farmer workshop on March 2, 2017 and will submit a funding request to PAAC, who has supported the project each year.

**Annual Christmas Gathering**

Max and Janice offered to host the party again this year. Thursday December 8, 2016 at 6pm. Isobel will send out an invite.

Adjournment: On a Motion from Bernadette Greene the meeting adjourned at 10:00 pm.  
 Next Meeting: The next regular PAC meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, January 12, 2017.**

**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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 Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary