



**MINUTES OF THE
PENINSULA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION**
Committee Room 2, Saanich Municipal Hall
Thursday, MARCH 9, 2017 AT 7:30 PM

Present: Bob Maxwell in the Chair; Phil Christie; Carol Davidson, Treasurer; Bernadette Greene; Linda Geggie; Jack Mar; Bev Marley; Larry Sluggett; Dianne Williamson; Councillor Holman, Central Saanich, and Anne Richmond, Metchosin. Also present was Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Clerk.

Guests: Gary Holman, MLA, Saanich North and the Islands; Derek Massellink, Regional Agrologist; Jane Evans, Saanich Planner; Dr. Shannon Berch; Nitya Harris; Larry Kimmett; Dr. Lora Morandin, Pollinator Partners; Kevin Brown; Jim Reislén;

Regrets: Councillors Derman, Graham and Weisenberger; Satnam Dheenshaw; Terry Michell & Robin Tunnicliffe.

Agenda: Moved by Carol Davidson and Seconded by Bernadette Greene "That the Agenda be approved."
(Note the order of the agenda was adjusted to accommodate schedules of some attendees) CARRIED

Minutes: Moved by Carol Davidson and Seconded by Linda Geggie: "That the Minutes of February 9, 2107 be adopted as circulated."

CARRIED

TREASURER'S REPORT – Carol Davidson

Carol reported:

- She assumed the treasurer duties mid-February and PAAC currently has a balance of 950.24 cents in the chequing account.
- PAAC approved up to \$1000 for the Bee Workshop, and the expenses for that totaled \$1001.50, so she had to cash another \$1,000 term deposit.
- Currently we have \$23,275.23 in a term deposit with Island Savings, earning 1.5% and expiring in August, as well as a second term deposit of \$1,000 @ 1%, expiring in October.
- She asked for direction and whether we should renew the deposits with Island Savings or somewhere else if we can get a better return. It may make a difference of up to \$100 a year.
- Cheques are expensive to purchase – 76 for \$50, but she was able to get 24 free.

Linda Geggie suggested that PAAC think about establishing an annual budget; we now have four things we will routinely focus on: the Farmer2Farmer workshop, the Saanich Fair and now the historical project (oral interviews), as well as the Winter Lecture Series.

MOTION: Moved by Phil Christie and Seconded by Larry Sluggett: "That PAAC form a sub-committee to establish an annual budget, chaired by the Treasurer, to provide a target for each year and guide the Commission in its decision making."

CARRIED

Councillor Holman stated the sub-committee could look into available grants. Many programmes have a September deadline. It would be worthwhile exploring both local, regional and provincial grants.

SPEAKER'S BUREAU:

Nitya Harris, Chair of the Coexisting with Carnivores Alliance

Nitya stated the Alliance is trying to reduce conflicts with large carnivores in the Capital Region, promote education, tolerance and support enhancement and habitat.

- Meetings are held about four times a year with a diverse group of people including local councils, the CRD, First Nations, provincial representatives, UVIC, farmers, citizens, Parks Canada and biologist, and others.
- As the CRD population continues to increase along with increase in interest in food security and local foods, opportunities for conflicts with large carnivores are expected to increase.
- Over the past 5 years, 54 bears and 30 cougars have been killed in this Region due to conflict. Of these, 14 bears and 22 cougars have been killed because of depredation on livestock.
- The Alliance is trying to develop a 3-year programme on how to co-exist with large carnivores; we are gathering information, talking to farmers to determine the issues and areas affected.
- The benefits of the programme would be to mitigate risk to livestock, manage conflicts pro-actively and find solutions (including a compensation program) for loss of livestock due to conflicts with large carnivores.
- She noted that some of PAAC's objectives work well with those of the Alliance and she asked that PAAC support the programme and work with the Alliance.

In response to questions, Ms. Harris stated:

- There is no definitive information at this time on populations of these large carnivores in B.C.
- She acknowledged that currently there are no black bear issues on the Peninsula, however the CO reports that bear conflicts on the peninsula come every few years. There are presently such conflicts in the Western communities.
- In Sooke a farmer was losing chickens; to stop this he installed an electric fence and this solution has worked.
- There are many things to explore; the intent is to keep farmers from losing their livestock and crops.
- She was not aware that the CRD had a compensation fund for dogs and livestock.

PAAC discussion noted:

- If the proposed programme is successful and as a result, for example, the black bear population increases, there will be many farmers and beekeepers on the Peninsula that won't be happy and there could be backlash.
- Installing electric fences or spikes, or high fences, etc. is a lot of effort on the part of the farmer to stop the black bears and other predators.
- Farming displaces trees and habitats: that is a fact and we can't have everything.
- The buffalo were displaced on the Prairies when grain was planted; it is a balancing act.
- We have to be practical without being extreme.
- Cougars can jump over fences.

- As long as the costs are not borne by the farmers, the proposed programme would be acceptable.
- Important to examine strategies and methods in other jurisdictions.

Derek Masselink stated:

- As well as the CRD, the province has compensation programmes, but wildlife management is an on-going concern; we need programmes in place and have all interests represented.
- He noted that swan and elk populations are making a comeback – which is good on one hand but presents new problems on the other hand.
- Wildlife management is about people: what do we value, how do we address safety issues and act on it in a socially acceptable manner?

Note: due to the heavy meeting schedule, there was no time to discuss this item after Ms. Harris left the meeting. A Motion and a letter to the Carnivore Alliance will be considered at the April 13 Meeting.

Dr. Shannon Berch, Research Scientist with Ministry of Environment & Founding Member of the Truffle Association of BC

Dr. Berch stated:

- The idea of cultivating truffles is very exciting for most people as the cost per kg varies from about \$100 up to over \$5,000.
- The truffle is related to the mushroom. She explained the lifecycle of a truffle, noting how many animals co-evolve with truffles and are an important part of the cycle by eating the mature truffle and eventually releasing thousands of truffle spores through elimination.
- There are two groups of truffles: black and white. She described the different varieties, noting that not all varieties can be cultivated.
- It takes 7 years to get the first truffle, and perhaps another 15 before you make an income.
- Truffles need a coarse soil, high in PH with good drainage and free from other competing fungi.
- In BC, there are 3 areas where they are cultivated: the south Island (near Nanaimo), the Fraser Valley (Abbotsford) and the Okanagan. They are also cultivated in Boise, Idaho and parts of California. A total of 10-30 ha are under cultivation in BC.
- There are many challenges and therefore low success rates: the wrong site, soil or climate, poor quality seedlings, poor maintenance.
- Trained dogs are used for harvesting; if the industry is going to succeed here, we need trained truffle dogs.

Larry Kimmitt, BC Farms and Food – Farmland Economic Initiative

Mr. Kimmitt stated:

- The purpose of the initiative is to look at how to improve the use of ALR land.
- Using Surrey as an example, he noted that of the 21,000 acres of ALR land, only 14,493 acres is in production. That means there is 7,500 acres of ALR land that is not being used.
- Agriculture in Surrey generates \$153 million per year and employs 4,470 people.
- If the underutilized land was turned into small-scale agriculture, think of how much food could be produced.
- Surrey's population, at 516,000, is about 20% of the Greater Vancouver Metropolitan region. For six months of the year, Surrey could be self-sufficient in 27 fruits and vegetables if they farmed the ALR lands not being used.

- Charts were displayed illustrating current consumption rates, types of produce grown, and the difference it makes by using the underutilized ALR lands.
- The conclusion of the study indicates that small-scale, intensive, direct market agriculture in our urban areas could generate \$30,000 to \$50,000 per year.
- Saanich has 4,557 acres in the ALR and 13,994 acres outside the Urban Containment Boundary.
- The true economic development potential of Saanich is in its small-scale agriculture.
- Often agriculture gets squeezed out by other kinds of development – but agriculture is sustainable and highly productive.
- Saanich is half rural and half urban, and it has the potential to be self-sufficient. There is great economic development potential, which, over time, will improve the local economy.
- We need to get this message to our local politicians and transform people's awareness and protect our ALR lands.

Councillor Holman stated that a community survey in Central Saanich indicated that a thriving agricultural sector was a top priority. She would be interested in applying the Farmland Economic Initiative model to Central Saanich. The Regional Sustainability Strategy also has high support for agriculture. She would encourage PAAC to share this information with other municipalities and decision makers: it is a way to maintain a rural balance and create economic benefits.

Gary Holman stated the competition for other land use is high. If returns are as high as indicated in the study, why are more people not getting involved in agriculture? One of the obstacles is the cost of land and other is capital costs; so how do we get past these obstacles and explore the potential.

PAAC comments noted:

- Part of the downside of increased agriculture production would be a lower tax base for the municipalities, water shortages, saturated farm markets, and the need to find storage facilities.
- We have a shorter growing season and higher labour costs making it difficult to have competitive pricing.
- A grower who intensively farms 1-acre made over \$60,000 last year states he is working at 60% capacity.
- Michells, the largest farm in the area, grosses \$10,000 per acre.
- The Food and Agriculture Task Force is doing a land use inventory for the region, which could provide great information to apply to the Farmland Economic Initiative.
- There is pressure on agricultural land right now – not only because people want to live on “estates” but also because of the lack of industrial land which could provide support services to agriculture – truck parking and storage facilities etc.
- There are currently such problems in the Blenkinsop Valley and in Central Saanich.
- As well as the obvious benefits, agriculture also supports groundwater recharging, pollinator and bird habitats and contributes to the general well-being of living.

Larry Kimmett acknowledged these points and agreed that the processing, storage and marketing aspect of agriculture also have to be expanded. Over \$8 billion worth of agriculture products are exported to the US and most of that money should stay here. The information from the inventory from the Task Force would be very helpful. He agreed we need a full assessment of all components to be considered as one complete package.

CORRESPONDENCE

- a) Request from the CRD for a farming representative (doesn't have to be a PAAC member) to sit on the CRD Water Advisory Commission. Michael Doehnel held this position for many years and his term has expired. He currently sits on the Saanich Peninsula Water Commission and the Saanich Peninsula Waste Water Commission. It was suggested that Jack Mar approach Greg Michell to see if he would be interested.

Councillor Holman advised that Central Saanich and the CRD are discussing ways to notify farmers of any disruption of water services in the future.

PAAC HISTORICAL AGRICULTURE & FOOD PROJECT – Linda Geggie

- As noted at the last meeting, whether PAAC proceeds any further at this time with the project, collecting oral histories from our old-time farmers is important and should be done sooner than later. The secretary checked with local author and historian Valerie Green to see if she would be interested assisting. Valerie has previously worked with Saanich Archives, interviewing Hugh Curtis and other dignitaries and has indicated she was interested in this project. An agreement will have to be prepared.
- The Chair noted that the North and South Agriculture Association is currently working on a similar historical project; we don't want to duplicate but we could collaborate – perhaps by including a CD of our oral interviews with the book.
- PAAC had previously agreed on three farmers to be interviewed: Jack Mar, John Pendray and Vern Michell and questions have been determined. Members thought we should add to the list and the following names were suggested:
 - Daphne Panter
 - Youall Brothers
 - Larry Sluggett
 - Stanhope Family (Dairy Farms)
 - Ron Bickford
 - Alyard Family
 - Stephen Roberts

MOTION: Moved by Linda Geggie and Seconded by Phil Christie: “That PAAC support a budget of up to \$1500 as a starting point on the Historical Agriculture and Food Project to collect oral interviews, and to explore a partnership with the Saanich Archives.”

CARRIED

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – NEW

- **Winter Lecture Series – Save the Bees – February 20, 2017 – Review**

The Chair stated:

- The “Save the Bees” Lecture held at the Saanich Fairgrounds on February 20th was very successful with approx. 145 in attendance. (*Copies of the evaluation results were circulated*).

- The two speakers, Dr. Lora Morandin from Pollinator Partners, and Lindsay Dault from Urban Bee Honey Farm, were well received.
- Many participants signed up to receive information and wanted to know how to help the bees.
- We are now trying to decide where we go next and how to get there.
- There are so many organizations and groups within the CRD that relate to pollinators and many of them want to participate; everyone he has talked to about the concept has been very supportive.
- Through many emails over the past few weeks, one suggestion was to form a coalition group, with PAAC at the centre, and the Pollinator Partnership being a major component also.
- Some of the participants may include farmers; institutions and churches; beekeepers; NGOs, Universities, schools and colleges; businesses, garden nurseries; youth organizations (4H); governments (all levels); landscapers and gardeners; seed savers, etc.
- The group can share its collective knowledge with those who are interested.
- People want to know what to plant – and this includes not only home gardeners, but farmers, municipalities, landscapers, etc. Anyone who has land can do their part.
- In the USA, the Habitat Highways programme plants over 3,000 acres a year in one state alone. (*Here is a useful info from Iowa: they have planted 50,000 acres with native plants.* <http://www.iowadot.gov/lrtf/irvm.html>)

Three things to consider:

1. Research: Currently a lack of information on pollinators.
 2. Funding: How much and from where?
 3. Who sits on the coalition, and is there a smaller working/steering group.
- The structure of the group needs to be such that we can apply for grants, launch a website or some way to communicate to those who are interested. There are some FOI concerns to consider using email addresses (eg: those collected from the lecture registration).
 - Keeping this in mind, it may be that a group like the Pollinator Partnership should take the lead.

General discussion noted:

- Dr. Lora Morandin of Pollinator Partners stated we need an interactive type group, with some roundtable discussions once every few months. She hopes to get the steering committee established soon. She suggested it be called the ***Island Pollinator Initiative (IPI)***.
- Bev Marley circulated Linda Gilkeson's new book "*Resilient Gardens*" which charts what to plant and when to plant it, notes when they flower and provides excellent information.
- The Saanich Fairgrounds donated the use of the room for the February 20th event, and they would like to see more events of this type.
- Perhaps there could be demonstration plantings at the fairgrounds.
- Linda Geggie acknowledged this a project that PAAC wants to support and the best way to do this would be to add it to the Education and Outreach objective. To date, we support the Farmer2Farmer conference and various projects at PAAC's Saanich Fair tent. Last year's project of a historical photo display was also set up the Farmer2Farmer workshop last week.
- Linda noted there are a few things to consider:
 - There is a wide range of organizations that could participate in the venture;
 - We need ways to engage these groups – whether it is face-to-face meetings or an email share setup.
 - Pollinator Partnership could take the the lead with PAAC as a key partner because with our mandate we can support the project either with funding and/or outreach.
- Councillor Holman noted that *BC Communities In Bloom* works with the province and the local municipalities and from time to time have grant progarmmes; it would be worth exploring.

MOTION: Moved by Linda Geggie and Seconded by Carol Davidson: “That PAAC supports the concept of establishing a coalition and will continue to explore its role for the Island Pollinator Initiative, working with the Pollinator Partnership Group.”
CARRIED

With respect to the emails collected for the February 20th meeting, Lora suggested the primary focus will be setting up a meeting with a core group (steering committee) within the next couple of weeks to get the initiative started. A secondary focus will be getting an email group started, using a format or server yet to be determined.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – CURRENT

a) Goose Management Strategy (Bev Marley)

- The Goose Committee has hired the consultant who will start the grant application process. There could be up to \$.5 million available, which would allow us to carry out a huge amount of work.
- We only have a limited amount of funds available and it costs money to apply for the grant.
- The current financial situation: we either use the money for the grant writer or the addling.
- If we are successful with the grant, we will need a project manager and an organization that could manage the money.
- Norm Doerkson with Central Saanich is looking into this; he thinks the grant application process will move forward quickly.
- We may have to ask the municipalities for funding – it has been a long time since we have asked.

The secretary noted that there is some funding available out of the additional funds PAAC receives each year, on a cost share basis, from the sponsoring municipalities.

MOTION: Moved by Phil Christie and Seconded by Carol Davidson: “That PAAC supports using the remaining funding available in the programme to cover the costs of a consultant to write the grant application.”

CARRIED

b) CRD Food & Agriculture Strategy (Linda Geggie)

Linda stated that she, along with others members of the CRD task force, Bob Maxwell, Bernadette Green, Jane Evans, and Derek Masselink met last week. The minutes have just been released and she will send a copy to the Secretary for distribution. She will have more to report at the next meeting.

c) Saanich Agriculture and Food Security Plan – Jane Evans

Jane thanked those members who attended the January 18th Open House at Cedar Hill Golf Course. The event was successful and the next steps will be to refine the actions and develop an implementation strategy. She will bring the updated plan to the next meeting.

As noted during discussions earlier in the meeting, she agreed that we need to protect industrial lands because landscape vehicles and other distribution trucks have somewhere to go, rather than encroaching on to agricultural lands.

d) Shellfish Harvesting Community Update – Jack Mar – nothing to report.

AGRICULTURAL STRATEGY – SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS

(Note: due to the lateness of the hour, most of the sub-committee reports were tabled to the next meeting).

- a) **Water (Michael Doehnel)** - Not present
- b) **Farm Economics (Terry Michell)** - not present
- c) **Agricultural Land Base (Phil Christie)** – nothing new to report at this time

Linda Geggie reported on two projects that Saanich is working on:

- **Noble Creek** – Saanich is looking impediments to the flow of the creek.
- **O'Donnel Creek** (brought to our attention by Phil Christensen) – Saanich is following up on the survey, cleaning out the weed and canary grass on Oldfield Road. They don't plan to do anything about the rock on the high points of the culvert.

- d) **Education and Outreach** (Linda Geggie)
Nothing further to report. She brief discussion on page 6 re including the Island Pollinator Initiative under this sub-committee.

2016 Annual Report

The secretary report the draft has been completed, and sent to those members who contributed reports for review. It should be ready to send to the Municipalities within the next few days.

Adjournment: On a Motion from Bernadette Greene the meeting adjourned at 9:55 pm

Next Meeting: **A poll was taken of members present to change the official meeting time from 7:30 pm to 7:00 pm. All were in agreement.**

The next regular PAC meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, March 9, 2017** at **7:00 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