



**MINUTES OF THE
PENINSULA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION**
Committee Room 2, Saanich Municipal Hall
Thursday, June 8, 2017 AT 7:00 PM

Present: Bob Maxwell in the Chair; Phil Christie; Satnam Dheenshaw (7:30 pm); Linda Geggie; Bernadette Greene; Jack Mar; Bev Marley; Terry Michell; Larry Sluggett; Dianne Williamson; Anne Richmond, Metchosin. Also present was Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Clerk.

Guests: Derek Masselink, Regional Agrologist; Bruce Greig, Planner, C. Saanich; Jane Evans, Saanich Planner; Ray Gale; Spring Harrison;

Regrets: Councillors Graham and Weisenberger.

Agenda: Moved by Jack Mar and Seconded by Bernadette Greene: "That Farm Worker Housing and Cumberland Weir be added to the Agenda.

CARRIED

Minutes: Moved by Dianne Williamson and Seconded by Phil Christie: "That the Minutes of May 11, 2107 be adopted with an amendment to Ms. Greene's comments on page 5 re the Sandown Property, deleting the first and third sentences."

CARRIED

TREASURER'S REPORT – Carol Davidson – not present

SPEAKER'S BUREAU:

◆ **Jane Evans, Saanich Planner: Saanich Agriculture & Food Strategy**

Jane stated:

- The process to identify issues relevant to agriculture and food security has been on-going for over a year now.
- The purpose is to bring forward recommendations in a policy-based document to local governments to bridge the gaps and improve food security.
- The document will provide clear direction to Council and staff and will be based on public input at open houses, as well as recommendations and comments from the Task Force and PAAC.
- The Policy Plan will identify projects and focus on issues local governments can legally tackle.
- Public engagement through workshops will continue as will meetings with stakeholders to refine the actions.
- A base-line action plan is currently being discussed with the Planning Director, the task force and the consultant.
- The themes, objectives and actions were presented to SCAN last night and were well received.
- She plans to form a sub-committee to review the proposed actions and noted it would be helpful if a PAAC member was on the sub-committee.
- By the end of June it is planned to download the plan on to the Saanich website (www.saanich.ca)
- Two open houses are planned for July and September.

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- At the PAAC meeting on June 8, 2016 many issues were identified and she has tried to include these within the themes and objectives
- Jane reviewed the 7 themes and objectives as follows: (comments in *italics* added by PAAC)
 1. **Provide a foundation to take action on agriculture and food security:** eg: set up an advisory committee; provide leadership; follow through on recommendations – Panama Flats for example; increase communications with regional partners.
 2. **Connect the gaps in the local food system to improve food self-sufficiency:** eg: reduce barriers; create supporting infrastructure; improve composting and waste management opportunities.
 3. **Strengthen awareness of the local food system:** eg: strengthen public education, support promotion of local farms and products; minimize wildlife impacts; address noxious and invasive species.
 4. **Improve interconnection between food production and the environment:** eg: sustainable water management; encourage farm practices that integrate into the natural ecosystem; *encourage pollinator habitats.*
 5. **Manage land use to protect and support farmland:** eg: maintain agricultural integrity of farmland, reduce conflicts between farm and non-farm areas, improve farm production levels, *support farm gate sales, greenhouse structures.*
 6. **Support multi-generational farmers and emerging farmers:** eg: support succession planning for farmers; *set up criteria for much needed farm worker accommodations;* support affordable access to farming and *explore land-linking; and transportation between the farm, the processing area and storage.*
 7. **Support expanded opportunities for urban agriculture:** eg: increase food production opportunities on public land; expand opportunities for small-scale agriculture in urban areas; *support the School Districts' education through gardening programmes; expand community gardens.*

Jane stated there are a total of 71 actions; it is not possible for the municipality to take on all of these actions and she is looking for help from other groups and partners. She noted it would very helpful if PAAC could help with identifying the key priorities to start with; however the end decision is up to Council. They will want to see agricultural stats that show agricultural as a real economic force.

Discussion ensued noting the following:

- The information presented is very topical with the public right now.
- Agriculture has been taken for granted for too long. It is a solid, expanding industry with over \$15 billion in annual sales, but it is always in the background.
- Our politicians need to take a serious look at this and PAAC needs to be more available to Councils providing them with up to date statistical information.
- **Suggested PAAC arrange for presentation to Saanich Council in the fall (October?) – and other Councils if they are interested.**

Derek Masselink praised Jane for the work completed to date and noted the following comments:

- The case for organic farming has been an important issue with the CRD's agricultural strategy and it has been suggested this is a provincial issue rather than regional or municipal.
- Regarding economic development information: What potential economic contributions are being made by the municipalities, the region and First Nations to make agriculture viable?

- What about a connection between the Saanich Plan and the Regional Plan? He understands there are many separate elements and you have to think about the audience, but he sees this as being a region-wide plan or at least having some alignment between the two plans.
- We are not investing as much as we can be for the return we are receiving.

PAAC discussion continued:

- Agricultural issues do not seem to receive the same amount of attention – either in the media or by our politicians – as other issues, such as cyclists and bike lanes. Over \$3 million was recently spent on bike lanes and trails in Victoria – but they are not generating any money.

◆ **Bruce Greig, Planner, C. Saanich: Maber Flats – Application for Deposit of Soil**

Letter dated May 30, 2017 from Central Saanich with a report on the ALC application for 9 lots on Meadowbank Road was received and circulated. A letter dated June 5, 2017 from Clayton Fox was also circulated.

Mr. Greig displayed maps of the area, and stated:

- Central Saanich Council considered the application on May 23 and passed a number of motions, including referring the issue to PAAC for comment on the need for a hydrological study.
- This is an ALC non-farm use application and Council can reject it or forward to the ALC with comments for or against the proposal.
- If approved by the ALC, Council would have to issue a Soil Deposit Permit and give the applicants permission to change to the right-of-way to allow truck access.
- The application applies to 9 lots, 34 acres in total; the plan is to remove the top layer of soil, add course fill, mostly clay, (198,000 cubic metres) to raise the level of the land, and put the top soil back.
- Estimated there is 12' of peat soils on top with clay underneath.
- Historically, this area is known as having low-lying marshy soils, underwater in the winter but it also produces very fertile soils once it dries out in the later spring.
- Referring to the maps of the area, he noted the whole point is to dry out the land – but the water has to go somewhere.
- The matter has not yet been referred to the Ministry of Environment; the Engineers have assured us there will be no change in drainage patterns if the land is filled, but he believes there are still unanswered questions.

Lengthy discussion ensued and the following comments noted:

- What type of fill is proposed, where is it coming from and will it enhance or benefit agriculture?
 - PAAC has serious concerns about this application; in particular the affect on adjacent lands.
 - Surrounding farmers have expressed concerns about what is going to happen to their water supplies. This is an important factor that needs to be considered.
 - However, on the other hand, why should one property owner take responsibility to supply water to property owners down-stream? The owners of the property – which has no direct road access - have been paying taxes to Central Saanich for years and yet they are basically unable to use it or build a house on it.
 - One member, while supporting this viewpoint in many ways, stated the major concern is the increasing significant soil deposits on agricultural land and the serious ramifications that occur. Municipalities have to obtain hydrological and geotechnical reports. There have been cases when land has sunk 20' overnight.

- It could set a precedent and open the door for similar applications in the vicinity of Maber Flats.
- It is understood that Central Saanich has acquired property in the area for a drainage facility.
- Of particular concern is the high-quality organic Metchosin-type soil that will be potentially impacted at Maber Flats, and which is found in very limited areas on the peninsula.
- It is understood that depositing fill on farmland is becoming a growing concern across the province, particularly where organic soils are concerned.
- At this time, it not been flagged by the Ministry of Agriculture as a major concern and there is likely a need to develop some protocol for this emerging issue.
- There is a lot of money at stake here: 198,000 cubic metres is about 30,000 dump truck loads – it could be as much as \$1.5 million.
- Noted there will be the cost of putting in a temporary road as the property is land-locked: Willow Way is currently a pedestrian trail.
- The ALC has already approved to install some form a drainage to 15 acres on the east side of the property; unsure if this project will continue to be supported. Central Saanich has not issued a soil test permit in this regard.
- Mr. Fox, 7235 Wallace Drive, has stated in a letter that if this application is approved he will apply for a deposit of fill permit as well.
- If one person gets a permit – everyone will want the same. The Municipality has to make a decision: do they want to maintain Maber Flats or not?

Derek Masselink stated:

- He believes the Ministry will be asked to comment on the application. He noted that decisions are being made on piece-meal basis and the over-all impacts are not being considered. He cited areas such as the Blenkinsop Valley, Panama Flats, Happy Valley, Cowichan, Courtenay, the Fraser Valley.
- The ALC is now looking at this and while the Ministry is considering developing protocol, there is currently not the expertise on staff.

MOTION: Moved by Phil Christie and Seconded by Linda Geggie: “That with respect to the application for non-farm use on the 9 lots (34 acres) on Meadowbank Road in the Maber Flats area, the Peninsula & Area Agricultural Commission strongly urges the District of Central Saanich to:

- look at this application in a comprehensive manner by requiring geotechnical and hydrological studies to be completed as well as assess the soils to determine the effect the placement of area-wide fill will have on the surrounding farmlands;
- determine the suitability of using the Willow Way Trail as road access to the sites;
- seek the opinion of the Ministry of Forests Lands and Natural Resource Operations, Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture;
- consider the effects this application will have on Hagen Creek.”

CARRIED

At this time, PAAC cannot support the application going forward without the points above being considered.

It was agreed Isobel will prepare a draft and circulate to members before submitting to Central Saanich.

CORRESPONDENCE

- a) PAAC letter to Regional Water Supply Commission regarding the agricultural water rate subsidy, requesting that a rep from PAAC be permitted to speak at the next Commission meeting when the water rate is being discussed.

BUSINESS ARISING

- a) **Website/Social Media:** proposed meeting with Saanich Web Development (Jane and Isobel); carry forward.
- b) **Visions Sandown:** Comments on governance issues requested on the plan from North Saanich.

Bernadette Greene stated the municipality wants comments on how the land would be managed should the plan go ahead. Some ideas being discussed include:

1. A possible hub of some kind on the property – such as a commercial kitchen? She noted that Longview Farms was working on a similar concept. As yet, there is nothing similar close by, road access is excellent and it is a central location for farmers.
2. A permanent farmers' market: it is a good location for this?
3. Building apartments above the market to rent to new farmers who are leasing land on the property. Certain production levels would have to be achieved to be able to rent an apartment. This could result in a small community of farmers that support each other and live on the land they farm. “Affordable Housing for Farmers” - perhaps with a 5 year renewable tenancy with 2.5 acre plots?

Linda Geggie noted the last presentation on this topic was in 2016. The first stage of remediation will be removal of the grandstands and other buildings. There is a phased development plan. Community presentations have been held with up to 500 people attending, including farmers and First Nations people. Wildlife and recreational values have been taken into account. Many ideas have been put forward regarding development of the lands – including an agricultural park.

Dianne Williamson had tried to find out about the number and depth of the test holes on the site and what was the impact of the fill on the site - but no one could tell her. She is familiar with this property since the 1950s when it was a swamp before it was a race track.

Spring Harrison stated there have been between 6 and 8 holes dug on the property with a small backhoe. The locations have been mapped. Air photos from 1946 have been obtained; there is evidence of soil stripping to build up the track. Another 20 acres look dubious re activities and disposal sites.

Jack Mar is concerned about the 10 acres that are planned to be traded and used for agriculture.

It was suggested we ask for a presentation from the Consultant and/or North Saanich staff; the plan provided has a lot of detail and it would be better to hear the information verbally. A site visit would also be helpful.

PAAC has concerns about soil contamination, the 10 acres planned to be traded and used for agriculture, the number and depth of test holes dug on site, the impact of fill on the site. . As well, the proposed 20 acres to be reclaimed in the northwest section of the 85 acre parcel has been given limited attention and should be brought to light again.

It is also not clear what North Saanich wants from PAAC as the governance issue is not really within PAAC's domain. It could be tricky if an independent management team were telling the municipality what to do. It was suggested N. Saanich could contact Anne Moskow for advice; she is an expert in protocol and business procedures.

Linda will contact the municipality to suggest an on-site meeting with some PAAC members.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – NEW

◆ Cumberland Weir: Ray Galey

Mr. Galey stated he has issues about Cumberland Weir which he would like Saanich to address.

- He understood that the weir was installed last fall for the purpose of water management and that there has been a change in management protocol.
- No one is pumping the water from the weir, which causes flooding and results in a food safety issue for his crops.
- He is also concerned about lowering the peat levels if the water is uncontrolled.

MOTION: Moved by Phil Christie and Seconded by Terry Michell: “That the Peninsula and Area Agricultural Commission supports Saanich Engineering communicating directly with Mr. Ray Galey to adjust the level of the weir as appropriate on an annual basis.”

CARRIED

◆ Farm Worker Housing – Terry Michell/Ray Galey

- There is an urgent need to provide affordable farm worker housing not only in Saanich and the Peninsula, but throughout the province.
- Farmers indicate that foreign workers are dependable and hard-working, but the cost of providing suitable housing and the related transportation to and from the farm is expensive.
- Having workers housed on the farm would be very beneficial to all concerned.
- As suggested by the PAAC last year, the issue of Farm Worker Housing (FWH) has been included as a high priority issue in the Saanich Agriculture and Food Strategy currently being developed. However, while this is appreciated, we also understand that it will take some time to implement the strategy as well as any required policies and bylaws.
- PAAC has been advocating for FWH for many years in order to support our farmers' urgent need to have on-farm accommodations for foreign workers.
- The availability of affordable and suitable housing is very limited. Other municipalities (eg: Richmond and Abbotsford) are working with the Agricultural Land Commission to implement a farm worker housing policy.
- Here on the Island, Central Saanich has been working on the issue for many years and has adopted a model bylaw #1726.

- Options for housing could include container-type housing, similar to the 'garden suites' recently approved by Saanich Council or trailers that can be moved when required.
- Similar to other permit applications, temporary or otherwise, having a streamlined application for FWH could be developed, with farmers having to provide proof of their annual farm income, their temporary housing requirements, how many workers they needed for a particular year, etc.
- Perhaps a special zone could be created within the agricultural zones to allow for FWH, requiring farmers to go through a public hearing process.
- It is important that the housing only be used for a legitimate farm.
- If desired, PAAC would be willing to review the applications, or they could be vetted by each municipality's agricultural advisory committee.
- With approval required from the Agricultural Land Commission, and other municipalities currently working on this issue, it would be practical to combine resources and develop a strategy or policy that is consistent province-wide.
- Currently within BC, 25,000 farm workers are living on farms – and this number is growing each year. Agricultural production hit a record \$15 billion last year and yet we feel that agriculture does not receive the respect and support it deserves.
- By comparison, consider the taxpayer dollars spent on implementing bike lanes throughout the Greater Victoria area – which although is good for the environment and the health of our citizens, does not contribute to the the local economy in the same way that agriculture does.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – CURRENT

- a) **Goose/Deer Management Strategy (Bev Marley)** – nothing to report
- b) **CRD Food & Agriculture Strategy (Linda Geggie)** - nothing to report
- c) **Saanich Agriculture and Food Security Plan** – Jane Evans (see page 1)
- d) **Shellfish Harvesting Community Update** – Jack Mar. Nothing to report.

WEBSITE – meeting still to be arranged with Jane, Isobel and Web technician

AGRICULTURAL STRATEGY – SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS

- a) **Water (Michael Doehnel)** - not present
- b) **Farm Economics (Terry Michell)** - nothing to add
- c) **Agricultural Land Base (Phil Christie)** – nothing further to add. See discussion page 3.
- d) **Education and Outreach (Linda Geggie)**

◆ **Saanich Fair (Theme for 2017 Breeds and Seeds - 149th year of the fair)**

Suggestions for this year :

- Including the Pollinator Initiative Group – Dr. Lora Morandin – to set up at the PAAC tent.
- Instead of the usual speakers' format, suggest have an “Ask and Expert” in a farm-related area for 2 or 3 hours each day at the PAAC tent to answer questions and speak to the public. Linda Gilkeson for example.
- The Zucchini Races are very popular and will run again this year. Many kids took home seeds to grow their own zucchini's for this year.
- Again there will be a coordinator (paid) from CR-Fair to be on hand all 3 days of the fair and to provide continuity
- Last year Linda had kids help out with the races, and they were given entry to the fair and a pass for the rides.
- She suggested a meeting be held in early August to discuss the details. All welcome.

MOTION: Moved by Linda Geggie and seconded by Phil Christie: “That up to \$1,000 be allotted for expenses for the Saanich Fair.”

CARRIED

Adjournment: On a Motion from Linda Geggie the meeting adjourned at 9:35 pm

Next Meeting: The next regular PAC meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, SEPTEMBER 14, 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
Recording Secretary