



**MINUTES OF THE
PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
Committee Room 2, Saanich Municipal Hall
Thursday, JANUARY 11, 2018 AT 7:00 PM**

- Present:** Jack Mar in the Chair; Phil Christie; Satnam Dheenshaw; Bernadette Greene; Carol Davidson; Bev Marley; Bob Maxwell; Terry Michell; Larry Sluggett; Dianne Williamson; Councillors Weisenberger (N.Saanich), Haynes (Saanich) and Anne Richardson (Metchosin). Also present was Derek Masselink, Regional Agrologist; and Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Clerk.
- Guests:** Mayor Alice Finall, North Saanich; Councillors Stock and Orr, North Saanich; Spring Harrison, North Saanich; Jarret Matanowitsch, Director of Planning, Central Saanich.
- Regrets:** Linda Geggie; Paul Welle; Councillor Bob Thompson; Robin Tunnicliffe.
- Minutes:** The Minutes of November 9, 2017 were adopted with some minor changes to page 5 re the Water Sub-committee report by Michael Doehnel.
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It was agreed to defer the annual elections for Chair, Vice Chair and Treasurer to the next meeting until all members were present. Introductions were made and the new Saanich Council representative Fred Haynes was welcomed to the Commission.

TREASURER'S REPORT – Carol Davidson

- PAAC has a balance of \$291.29 in their chequing account and \$23,541.83 in total in term deposits.

SPEAKER'S BUREAU:

Vision Sandown – Various Speakers

PAAC's letter to North Saanich dated December 15, 2017 together with the accompanying report were circulated.

- Spring Harrison presented a slide show depicting the changes at Sandown from 1946 to 2013.
- Bernadette presented some pictures from the December walkabout by PAAC members.
- Generally, the soil was very good. However, some areas were deeply rutted and very wet.
- In the south field near Glamorgan Road the soil is classified as Parksville soils – sandy with lots of organic matter. Digging down to 60cm, very little water was found.
- Phil pointed out that generally society does not understand the value of good top soil; on Vancouver Island we are gradually decreasing the content of our soils, so to find organic matter at 2' deep is a very valuable resource.
- Spring Harrison pointed out that although the development agreement says an agrologist must oversee the process, this has not happened.
- Those on the walkabout generally agreed that the grandstand was a valuable asset for agricultural use and should be preserved rather than demolished.
- Some of the uses for the grandstand include farm worker housing, an aggregating facility, office and storage space, cold warehouse storage, use by garden groups, a community kitchen or a farm market.
- The structure appears sound, with no rust and strong support beams. Some of the kitchen equipment can be salvaged.

- Terry Michell noted he recently spent \$35,000 building covered storage on his farm. If the grandstand is demolished there will need to be remediation to remove the concrete pad anyway; there is a lot of value in keeping the structure.
- The footprint of the grandstand is very small in terms of the entire site, perhaps 5%.
- It was agreed the asphalt in front of the grandstand would be very useful for delivery trucks. It is about 3" thick and has no cracks. Estimated it would be \$150,000 to pour a pad of this size.
- Regarding the limestone, some areas had a depth of 2.5 m, and is a valuable resource at \$65 per yard; estimated value is about \$1.4 million.
- Some of the ponds are slated to be filled in; some members think these should be left as irrigation ponds.

Councillor Orr stated one of the problems is that Platform has been contracted to demolish all the buildings and they want to have this work completed within the next few months. Partial demolition is not an option unless we re-negotiate the contract.

It was questioned whether the entire area would be subdivided into smaller plots for young or new farmers, or would it be leased to one farmer, and would there be a management group?

Mayor Finall stated:

- throughout the entire process, North Saanich has made it clear it is not going to operate the farm. It is hoped that a citizens group can take over the management.
- One of the requirements set out by the ALC is that all buildings must be demolished and the owner has agreed to this.
- The District is in a difficult situation time-wise and she doesn't know how we could have put the agreement together in a more cohesive way.
- It was not until September that the ALC agreed to the demolition and the drainage works.

The Regional Agrologist stated:

- It may be worthwhile talking to the ALC again about what has recently been discovered about the buildings and the asphalt, etc.
- Perhaps an advisory committee should be struck to determine a vision going forward. As of now, the ALC is out of the equation.
- This is the worst time of year to work on the site. The Minister of Agriculture is very interested in the project because this is one of the first examples like this in the province and you will be under a microscope.
- Not all residents are happy with the decision and the property may suffer, which is where the advisory committee, or steering committee, may help.
- A clear vision needs to be identified and executed.
- He understands there is a proposal for a Farmland Trust for the area – how do we manage these properties for something that has always been a private responsibility?

Mayor Finall advised that no further approvals are required from the ALC, but she believes they are still interested in the project. She agreed striking an advisory/steering committee and hiring an agrologist are good suggestions.

CORRESPONDENCE

- a) Confirmation from sponsoring municipalities as to Paul Welle's 3 year appointment to PAAC, and appointing Councillors Graham, Haynes and Weisenberger, and Anne Richmond representing Metchosin Council, to the Commission.

- b) Grant request from CR-Fair for \$1,000 towards this year's Farmer2Farmer Conference in March. PAAC has supported the event for many years; last year giving \$500. Originally the ask this year was for up to \$5,000. Some members thought this would be an excellent use of PAAC funds, but others agreed that \$1,000 was sufficient and double last year's grant.

MOTION: Moved by Phil Christie and Seconded by Bernadette Greene: "That PAAC grant \$1,000 to the 2018 Farmer2Farmer Conference hosted by CR-Fair in March."

Carried.

- c) PAAC letter of support for the 2019 Agricultural Show at the Saanich Fairgrounds.

BUSINESS ARISING

PAAC Historical Agriculture and Food Project:

- Letter has been drafted to send to Stellys School regarding assistance from students with the interviews of long-time farmers.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – NEW

•Winter Lecture Series – January thru April, 2018

- As anticipated, registration is slow. There has been wide-spread email distribution.
- The first event is scheduled for Thursday, January 25 at the Saanich Fairgrounds. Jack Mar will speak on the history of farming, planting and growing.
- Jack advised he has ten items to discuss; these items will be included in a handout, leaving space for notes.
- He proposes to have some prizes (plants).
- Suggested a small poster be distributed to places like Buckerfields, Integrity Sales, Farm Markets, Bordens, etc., and advertised on appropriate websites (Saanich, CR-Fair, etc).
- It was suggested that to boost attendance, perhaps a small ad in the local papers, or invite someone from the Peninsula News to attend, however some members noted that even 20 attendees would be a good turnout and allow for better discussions.

Bob Maxwell advised this is an experiment – we want to see if there are people/farmers who need more information. There are currently lots of sites, events and businesses to gather information – such as Farmer2Farmer, Abbotsford Ag Show, Cowichan Ag Show, DFMA, organic groups and businesses like Integrity Sales.

The secretary will prepare a poster for distribution.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – CURRENT

a) Goose/Deer Management Strategy (Bev Marley)

Bev stated that Jeff Weightman from the CRD is arranging for an egg addling workshop.

She has been talking to people who may have nests on their property.

Discussion noted there are still thousands of geese around, and lately they land in hay fields and around irrigation ponds.

Michell Farms is using authorized hunters for the geese on its property.

Deer sightings are reduced.

b) CRD Food & Agriculture Strategy (Linda Geggie not present)

Derek Masselink stated the CRD has been discussing the Farmlands Trust issue. A meeting is scheduled in a few weeks.

c) Saanich Agriculture and Food Security Plan – Jane Evans – not present.

d) Shellfish Harvesting Community Update – Jack Mar

Jack suggested this item be removed from the agenda; he was not informed of the last meeting change and has heard nothing for months.

e) Island Pollinator Initiative (IPI) (Bob Maxwell)

Bob Maxwell reported IPI is planning a workshop. Haliburton Farms is involved as well. Another event is planned at the Juan de Fuca Recreation Centre. The group is very active and making steady progress.

f) Farm Worker Housing – Guidelines for Seasonal Housing for Temporary Farm Workers in BC dated October 2016 was distributed.

Satnam Dheenshaw stated:

- the document contains a lot of information on construction, drainage facilities, size of rooms, number of bathrooms required, etc.
 - Inspectors visit regularly to check measurements and compliance with guidelines.
 - In 2017 he had 14 temporary workers; he expects to have at least 21 in 2018.
 - Terry Michell has been approved for up to 20 workers, but could use 25 or more at times.
 - It is a federal programme and you have to meet the guidelines in order to qualify to receive foreign workers.
 - It is estimated at least 100 foreign workers are needed on the Peninsula.
 - Ray Galey (Saanich) would like 14; Longview Farms (Central Saanich) is looking for at least 40.
 - Galey's has to house the workers in regular housing, which is expensive, and he has been asking Saanich to look into approving FWH for many years.
- Central Saanich has identified FWH as a priority this year, and will be looking at regulations and ways to simplify the process.
 - North Saanich has a bylaw in place to regulation FWH. Ruby Red Farms employs many temporary workers.
 - Saanich has no policies or bylaws in place, but has identified this as a need in its draft Agriculture and Food Security Strategy.
 - Metchosin has guidelines in its Land Use Bylaw, permitting mobile homes of a certain size if the parcel in question is 10 acres or more.

Discussion noted:

- There are guidelines, which PAAC supports in principle.
- Beyond this, what is PAAC's role? What can we do to support FWH?
- Work needs to be done to simplify and streamline the guidelines to make it easier on the farmers.
- We need a standardized policy throughout the CRD, with annual inspections.
- Municipalities seem to be concerned that any housing built on the farm would be rented out to non-foreign farm workers when not in use. Farmers are adamant this would not occur.
- Last year, PAAC sent a letter of support for FWH to each municipality; no response received.
- Temporary use permits may work, but do not offer the certainty required by both the workers and the farmers.

- Under the guidelines, the foreign worker must live on the farm on which they work; this is noted on the application form. Workers cannot be loaned out to another farm.

MOTION: Moved by Phil Christie and Seconded by Carol Davidson: "That PAAC write to the sponsoring municipalities indicating our support for Farm Worker Housing, and asking that the guidelines be reviewed to make them more favourable and simpler, with standardized regulations."

Carried.

AGRICULTURAL STRATEGY – SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS

a) **Water** (Michael Doehnel) not present

b) **Farm Economics** (Terry Michell)

With recent works done to Maber Flats, the water table is lower. It was suggested by the Engineer at Central Saanich that the ALC should be advised there has been some changes in the area and to review the fill permit application from the landowner. Further study is being done on the water flows.

γ) **Agricultural Land Base** (Phil Christie)

- Farmland in the last few years has doubled in price on the Peninsula.
- The provincial government recently made the decision on the Site C dam which will result in 10,000 acres of farmland being flooded and lost from the ALR.
- On the east coast of the Island we have 600,000 of relatively flat land; not all of this is Class 4 or better, but probably a third of it is, but very little of that is actually used as farmland.
- In lieu of the 10,000 acres being lost, we need to put more emphasis into getting more of the east coast of Vancouver Island's Class 1-4 agricultural land into active production.
- This government was apologetic about flooding the farmland – perhaps they should put more emphasis on compensating for the loss of farmland at Site C by encouraging more farming here on the Island.

Derek Masselink mentioned a new provincial committee has been formed to shape the revitalization of ALR lands, with several members from the ALC. He will send the secretary the link, and he encouraged PAAC to follow the progress and provide input.

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2018AGR10002-000009>

Discussion noted:

- The time has come to support agriculture and to recognize that the Island has some wonderful growing land this is under-utilized.
- The difference between the provincial budgets for forestry and agriculture were discussed, noting that distribution has been unfair in the past to agriculture, while acknowledging that they are two very different things.
- Diet and wholesome food affects our health in so many ways; 80% of cardiac and respiratory issues, as well as type 2 diabetes can be prevented with a healthy diet.
- The implementation of cannabis farms has to potential to change the face of agriculture and the price people will pay for agricultural land. Stanhope land sold for \$100,000 per acre.

Livestock on BC Ferries

Dianne Williamson raised an issue about the transportation of live birds to and from her farm on the Peninsula and Abbotsford.

- The practice of allowing trucks with livestock to board the ferry if they arrive 30 minutes before the sailing was discontinued some time ago, for some reason with no rationale given.
- Reservations can be made, but this can be difficult also.
- The Vancouver Island Chicken Growers wrote a letter to BC Ferries about this issue and no response has been received. Dianne has also received no help over the phone.
- On November 28, 2017 if not for the intervention of Lana Popham, Minister of Agriculture, the truck carry newly hatched chicks from Abbotsford would have been waiting until the 1pm ferry, not arriving at Firbank Farms until 3pm. The chicks would have been without water during this time.
- There is a *National Animal Care Council Code of Practice* about the care and handling of hatched eggs and poultry to reduce stress during the transportation process. This information was sent to BC Ferries.
- Firbank Farms has up to 85 trucks a year, costing thousands of dollars, traveling on the ferries between the Island and the Mainland – and this considered a highway. Most other poultry farms use Duke Point, and they are facing similar issues.
- It is not just poultry that is affected, but all livestock: horses, swine, cattle. Refrigerated trucks transporting fruits and vegetables could also be affected.
- This is a serious animal welfare situation and needs to be addressed promptly.
- It is understood a partial reason for shortage of ferry space is from an increase in tour buses.

Lengthy discussion ensued.

MOTION: Moved by Terry Michell and Seconded by Phil Christie: “That PAAC write to BC Ferries CEO and the Board indicating its strong concern about the policy changes in transporting livestock, requesting they reinstate the practice of permitting trucks carrying livestock to board if they arrive 30 minutes prior to sailing and also that the reservation process be simplified.”

Copies of the letter to be sent to the Ministers of Agriculture and Transportation, MLA's, Tourism Victoria, South Island Prosperity Project, BC Horse Council, BC Agriculture Council, Regional Agrolgist and Councils. Dianne to provide statistics and other information to supplement the letter.

The Motion was Put and Carried.

d) Education and Outreach (Linda Geggie) – not present

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Islands Agricultural Show, Cowichan Valley: February 2 and 3, 2018
- Farmer2Farmer, Saanich Fairgrounds: March 2, 2018

Adjournment: On a Motion from Bev Marley the meeting adjourned at 9:15 pm

Next Meeting: The next PAAC meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, February 8, 2018 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