



**MINUTES OF THE
PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
Committee Room 2, Saanich Municipal Hall
Thursday, June 14, 2018 AT 7:00 PM**

Present: Jack Mar in the Chair; Phil Christie, Co-Chair; Carol Davidson, Treasurer; Linda Geggie; Terry Michell (7:25pm); Larry Sluggett; Dianne Williamson. Councillors Haynes (Saanich), Thompson (Central Saanich) and Weisenberger (North Saanich). Also present was Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Clerk.

Guests: Adam Olsen, MLA Saanich North & the Islands (7:27 pm); Paul Nursey, Tourism Victoria; Lori Hrycuik, Ministry of Agriculture; Larry Kimmett, BC Farms & Food; Ryan Vantreight; Jeff Weightman; Ivo ** Central Saanich Planner; Jim Reislen;

Regrets: Satnam Dheenshaw, Bev Marley.

Minutes: The Minutes of May 10, 2018 were adopted as circulated.

TREASURER'S REPORT – Carol Davidson reported no changes, other than a few cents interest.

SPEAKER'S BUREAU:

Paul Nursey, President and CEO, Tourism Victoria

Paul stated:

- He has been working with Saanich Councillors Brownoff and Haynes over the past 1.5 years to explore tourism opportunities for Saanich and the Region.
- The tourism industry is growing faster than ever before and will continue to grow globally.
- There is a demand for different types of experiences. In developing some ideas for Saanich, it is clear there is a growing interest in agri-tourism, not only in this region but around the world.
- He understands there are challenges with ALR regulations but there are business opportunities.
- Mr. Nursey talked about the employment opportunities provided by the tourism industry, from front line staff to e-marketers, resulting in 23,000 direct jobs.
- Countries like Canada, New Zealand, Australia and Japan account for a large share of the market; they are considered safe and interesting countries to visit. Victoria is rated the #2 small city in the world.
- The trend with tourism is now leaning to having experiences. Over 10% of tourists to the USA consider agri-tourism as a primary motivator.
- He mentioned some “value added” farms that make thousands of dollars from agri-tourism, including the last vanilla producing farm in the western hemisphere in Hawaii. Other examples include hosting festivals at farms, farm to table cuisine, etc.
- Tourism Victoria is a proud sponsor of the North Saanich Flavour Trail initiative, and will sponsor the successful event again this year. This type of event can be duplicated and/or expanded.

General discussion ensued and PAAC members noted the following:

- While most farmers may support agri-tourism, there are some conflicts such as parking and noise. It is hoped that Tourism Victoria can work with the Ministry of Agriculture to address the conflict areas within the ALR.

- It would not be advisable to use the higher class farmlands for construction of tourism venues.
- Landscapes around southern Vancouver Island are diverse and some farms do have areas with lower-class soils. With good planning, working with the farmers, the Ministry and PAAC, some opportunities could be found.
- There are many wineries that could offer tourism opportunities.
- Noted that in the south of France, there are farms that integrate vegetable growing and permaculture that are real show cases, offering training for students, complete with accommodations and meals.
- With respect to the North Saanich Flavour Trail, CR-Fair is looking to develop more standardized tours, find locations that will be open to accepting tours, and provide an authentic experience, have ample parking and washrooms. This area has a lot to offer and the plan is to test a few ideas and pilot projects to work out the kinks.
- A few years ago, a lot of work was carried out by BC Agri-tourism. Oldfield Road has a high concentration of direct farm marketing outlets. Perhaps we should consult with the DFMA. The trouble areas were traffic, parking and noise.

The Chair thanked Mr. Nursey for taking the time to discuss agri-tourism with PAAC. Mr. Nursey left the meeting.

CORRESPONDENCE:

- Letter to Ministry of Agriculture re wildlife problems.
- Letter to Saanich in response to presentation at the May meeting regarding an ALR exclusion application on Marsett Place (previously Royal Oak Golf Course).

2018 SAANICH FAIR PLANNING – Linda Geggie

Linda stated:

- A meeting was held at CR-Fair's offices a few weeks ago with Larry Kimmett, CR-Fair staff and Isobel Hoffmann to discuss an idea about combining the 150th anniversary of the Saanich Fair and PAAC's historical agriculture and food project.
- A tentative budget of \$1200 was set to hire someone to conduct the interviews with the designated farmers, develop some stories and produce an article for the Fair based on the questions that were suggested by the Commission last year.
- We also discussed approaching Black Press about a pull-out insert.
- Oliver at the Black Press was very supportive of the concept to showcase the history of farming, and wanted to participate in the project, complete with photos, interviews, and a few videos.
- The agreement is that Black Press and PAAC will be partners for an 8-page supplement and Buckerfields will be a sponsor and partner as well. 65,000 copies will be produced and PAAC will receive the over-runs for handouts at the Fair.
- The interviews will be on line for PAAC to use; Buckerfields will do some promotion at their store and on their website.
- PAAC will supply the questions and the names of at least 3 old time farmers and 3 new farmers.
- The \$1200 allocated in our budget will be provided to the Black Press to help with production.
- Because this will be a public document, there will be no copy rite issues; PAAC has final approval of the video and copy content.

Discussion noted:

- Heritage Acres in Central Saanich may wish to participate, providing photographs or displaying some artifacts at the PAAC booth. Larry Kimmett offered to research; Councillor Thompson suggested he discuss this with the Saanich Fair as space is limited.

Regarding the PAAC booth at the Fair, Linda confirmed that the Pollinator Partnership group will be asked to participate again this year; they also provided volunteers for the booth.

- There will be the ever-popular zucchini races which generates lots of activity.
- It was suggested we could have some information on agri-tourism at the tent this year as well; brochures and pictures can be on display.

Linda Geggie left the meeting

FARM WORKER HOUSING

A summary of the discussions, reports, letters, etc. compiled over the past 10 years or more since the issue of providing on-site farm worker accommodations has been discussed by PAAC was prepared.

Adam Olsen, MLA for Saanich North and the Islands, and Lori Hrycuik, Executive Director of Corporate Services with the Ministry of Agriculture were present to listen to the discussions and provide input, together with Ryan Vantreight of Long View Farms, who currently has an application in process with Central Saanich Municipality.

Discussion noted:

- Legitimate applications for farm worker housing on a farm property are sometimes viewed as an excuse for more housing on the property. Larger farms have a definite need for foreign workers and therefore need temporary housing on site. It is inconvenient and expensive to house the workers at motels and bus them to the farm every day.

Ryan Vantreight stated:

- There is a constant need on some farms for foreign and/or domestic seasonal workers.
- There is also a definite lack of affordable places for the workers to stay that are near a farm.
- His farms needs between 18 and 24 workers.
- If some workers want to work on a farm year-round, why can't they have housing on the farm?
- This topic has been talked about for many years and the need has become more vital.
- There are so many obstacles that hinder applications for temporary farm worker housing; enough is enough.
- We need to be able to make an application to the ALC to have camp-style housing, or to apply to the municipalities for a Temporary Use Permit. Farmers should have to prove they need X number of workers; it would all be documented.
- On behalf of Longview Farms, he has made application to Central Saanich to apply to the ALC for a farm worker housing camp on the farm.
- Central Saanich has received the application; they can now reject it, or send it to the ALC with or without a recommendation.
- The farm has a suitable area for the housing behind the greenhouses; it is hard pan and there is no soil in this area.
- Eight portable modular-style homes are proposed. Eight rooms per unit, 7 being bedrooms that will contain a bed, desk, mini fridge; there will be one common room. One unit will have showers and washrooms and a kitchen.

- The closest neighbours are on St. Michael's Road, at least 200 m away. Privacy hedging will be planted.

Discussion noted if approved, this will be a good test run and could set a good example. It seems that farmers are facing roadblocks year after year.

Adam Olsen, MLA, stated:

- He recalls talking about this topic when he sat on Central Saanich Council. Now as a critic for agriculture on behalf of the Green Party, he needs to own up to the fact that he knew nothing about agriculture when he sat on Council.
- It is insanity that Ryan has to keep defending and explaining the need for accommodations, including taking into consideration the closest neighbours to the worker housing buildings.
- The "romantic" view of agriculture gets in the way of agriculture as a business.
- The ALR is a zoning tool but not a farm tool. This is a good example of how ALR regulations can get in the way of agricultural needs.
- The site proposed on Longview Farms is a good location.
- The ALR and ALC were created for non-farmers, to make us feel that we have food security.
- The ALR protects the land – but not necessarily the farm economy.
- This is not the first time the Vantreights have come forward with a plan for Farm Worker Housing.

Councillor Weisenberger stated:

- The Province needs to step up and help with the application process to make it easier to allow this type of use on ALR lands.
- Also, farm workers staying on one farm should be able to work on other farms to make the maximum use of the accommodation facilities.
- It is clear there is a great need for this: it is time to stop talking about it and take action instead.

Councillor Thompson stated:

- The application from Longview Farms is very timely.
- He has spoken with the Planning Institute of BC about Temporary Use Permits (TUP); an issue appears to be that the housing could be used as rental accommodation rather than just for farm workers.
- He believes a TUP is the way to go for this particular application. The proposed site is well located and it would serve as a good model.
- Hopefully the municipalities can work together and get this process moving in the right direction.
- People have different opinions on the issue of shared accommodations; this is a key issue that has to be resolved clearly and not ambiguously.
- A major problem is that some people will abuse the system; applications need to be from a bone fide farm.
- If the province takes responsibility for managing this, who is going to enforce it?

Ms. Hyrcuik stated:

- This is a common issue throughout the province.
- Farm worker housing is a priority for the Minister and a committee has been established to look not only at farm worker housing but also mega (monster) houses on ALR lands.
- She expects recommendations will come forward on this issue soon.
- There are over 600 temporary farm workers in BC and this number is expected to rise to 1500 within the next few years.
- The ALR was formed to protect farmland and Minister Popham is very passionate about and committed to protecting the land and the farmers.
- Apparently it was never intended for local governments to be the 'gate keeper' of farm activities.

- It is interesting to hear one of the challenges for farmers is that local governments are not forwarding applications to the ALC.
- Legislation states all applications should be forwarded with or without a recommendation and the ALC makes the decision.
- It is important that the process start with the local municipalities, as indicated in the community plans, and then forwarded to the ALC. She agreed there needs to be better clarity with regard to the rules and regulations of local government.
- Not all farmland is created equally. There is a difference between Class 1 and Class 7 land.
- Obviously you would not put temporary housing on the higher class lands.
- There will be recommendations coming regarding the ALR and housing is going to one of them.
- Local governments do have a role to play: they are responsible for community planning – and we need them to work collectively on this.
- It is hoped that the advisory committee will issue its report by the end of July, but there are many written submissions and presentations to review and a lot of information to process. This is important work and it needs to be done well.
- Ultimately it will be up to the Minister to make the final decisions on how to proceed. This is one of her top priorities.

Ryan Vantreight stated:

- In the meantime, until the province makes its rulings, the local governments do have mechanisms to facilitate these decisions.
- They can support temporary housing through a TUP, and they can forward applications with or without support to the ALC, who will make the final decision. Unfortunately the challenge always seems to be at the municipal table.
- He also noted that the term “housing” can set off a number of red flags with municipalities and neighbours; he suggested “accommodation” may be a better term.

The Vice-Chair noted that farm worker accommodation is one of PAAC's top priorities and he asked Mr. Hyrcuik how PAAC could help push it forward. The Commission has a lot of knowledge and willingness to help; we write letters but we keep hitting roadblocks. Farm worker accommodations should be part of the *Farm Practices Protection Act*, with regulations to define a bone fide farm.

Ms. Hyrcuik stated:

- The recommendations will be released to the public and there will be an opportunity to comment. It is important that responses be in writing and it will be critical to let the Minister know if she has the support to proceed with the recommendations.

PAAC comments:

- If the provincial government supports worker accommodations it will have an effect on local government. We need help from the top down.
- Labour is one of the most important thing to farmers, especially the larger farms.
- Accommodations need to be comfortable; federal inspection programmes are in place.
- Farmers should be able to get help from the municipalities, not confrontation.
- Suggested PAAC should submit a letter to the Minister stating its position and what changes they would like to see in the ALR regulations to help the farmers in need of on-farm accommodations.
- Noted that small-scale farms are important and they are part of what creates this bucolic landscape to the south Island. It could be a sensitive issue.
- There needs to be a gross income threshold for an application to be considered.

- The cost of farmland is increasing, the number of farmers is decreasing: put that with the changing demographics and we have a problem. It is hoped the new ALR regulations will help to stabilize the price of farmland.
- Part of the problem is that when the ALR legislation was put in place in 1972 the government promised they were going to look after the farmers. The farmers' income has not kept up with the economy and the price of farmland.

Adam Olsen stated it is important the update to the ALR regulations deal with non-farmers, those who benefit from the tax savings but don't operate a bone fide farm and perhaps have a high-salaried job somewhere else. This will make it easier for the local Councils to make decisions if the definition is clear. There needs to be a minimum threshold of income for a farmer to have farm worker accommodations.

Councillor Haynes stated:

- Saanich has many small-scale farms and they may need workers at times too.
- England has the *Enclosure Act* and the smaller farms only survive because of the tenant farms.
- If regulations are too tight and restrictive it could cause problems.
- He referred to the May 14 report to Saanich Council from Councillor Dean Murdock regarding the issue of size and location of homes on agricultural land, noting he would like PAAC to provide comments for Council's consideration. The report recommends staff undertake a review of agricultural zones regarding these homes.

Ms. Hyrcuik stated the issue of large homes on farms is being considered by the Advisory Committee. Many communities across the province have the same issue – large homes built in the centre of the property with outdoor pools, tennis courts, etc.

MOTION: Moved by Phil Christie and Seconded by Carol Davidson: “That PAAC write a letter to the Minister of Agriculture outlining PAAC's position with respect to ALR regulations.”
CARRIED

MOTION: Moved by Phil Chistie and Seconded by Carol Davidson: “That PAAC support the recommendation outlined in Councillor Dean Murdock's report and submit a letter of support accordingly.”
CARRIED

Ms. Hyrcuik and Mr. Olsen left the meeting

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – CURRENT

- Goose/Deer Management Strategy (Bev Marley/Jeff Weightman)**
Jeff advised he will have a report in September.
- CRD Food & Agriculture Strategy - Linda Geggie**
Jeff advised it is hoped that the Strategy will be available prior to the fall election.
- Saanich Agriculture and Food Security Plan (Jane Evans has now retired)**
Nothing to report; Plan is on hold with Saanich.
- Island Pollinator Initiative (IPI) (Bob Maxwell) – nothing to report**

e) **Sandown Update** - nothing to report

PAAC Historical Agriculture and Food Project: See discussion under Saanich Fair

AGRICULTURAL STRATEGY – SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS

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

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

Terry advised he is currently harvesting strawberries, lettuce, potatoes and cabbages. Good crops of hay this year.

c) **Agricultural Land Base** (Phil Christie) – nothing to report

d) **Education and Outreach** (Linda Geggie) – see discussion on Saanich Fair.

OTHER:

FORAGE WORKSHOP & BRAINSTORMING:

The Chair suggested over the summer, PAAC members think of the direction PAAC should be heading and hopefully we can do some brainstorming in September when we meet again.

The Co-Chair stated he would like to set up a forage workshop, visiting up to 3 different farms covering topics such as soils, fertilizers, etc. The Ministry of Agriculture has recently hired a forage expert. He suggested mid to late May would be a good time.

BC FAIRS

Councillor Thompson referred to a June 4, 2018 letter from BC Fairs & Exhibitions about a new marketing opportunity to partner on a social media campaign with BC Fairs and the Ministry of Agriculture. He thought it would be a good opportunity for PAAC to participate in a “Buy Local” display at this year's Saanich Fair. Members noted that the Buy BC programme was very successful and it is good it is being used again.

Although members were not exactly sure what was expected of them, they agreed it was a good opportunity and were willing to participate. Councillor Thompson will report back.

Adjournment: On a Motion from Carol Davidson, the meeting adjourned at 9:15pm

Next Meeting: The next PAAC meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, September 13, 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