



**MINUTES OF THE
PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
Committee Room 2, Saanich Municipal Hall
Thursday, FEBRUARY 8, 2018 AT 7:00 PM**

Present: Bob Maxwell in the Chair; Phil Christie; Linda Geggie; Jack Mar; Bev Marley; Larry Sluggett; Paul Welle; Dianne Williamson; Councillors Weisenberger (N.Saanich), Haynes (Saanich), Holman (C. Saanich) and Anne Richmond (Metchosin). Also present was Derek Masselink, Regional Agrologist; and Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Clerk.

Guests: Hon. Lana Popham, Minister of Agriculture; Ivo van der Kemp, Planner, Central Saanich; Jeff Weightman, CRD; Gregory Atkinson, Executive Assistant to Minister of Agriculture; Michael Doehnel; Hally Hofmyer; Katie Cox

Regrets: Councillor Bob Thompson; Robin Tunnicliffe, Terry Michell, Carol Davidson, Satnam Dheenshaw.

Minutes: The Minutes of January 11 2018 were adopted as circulated.

It was agreed to defer the annual elections for Chair, Vice Chair and Treasurer to the next meeting until all members were present.

TREASURER'S REPORT – Carol Davidson – Not Present

SPEAKER'S BUREAU:

- **Honourable Lana Popham, Minister of Agriculture**

The Commission welcomed Minister Popham to the meeting. A list of topics and discussion issues was previously circulated to the Minister and Commission Members.

Minister Popham stated:

- She understands the network of farm communities across the province through her ten years as the Agricultural Critic; she always relies on the conversations she has with people and farmers who care about the food system of BC.
- She feels passionate about the agriculture mandate: for years we have all seen the erosion of the Ministry of Agriculture and we have lost many of the resources we rely on.
- She plans to improve these resources in the most cost-effective way.
- There are plans to provide more extension services across the province that support farming and its land base.
- “Grow BC” will be reinstated.
- A full review of the ALR will be launched. She expects a report by the end of the summer with strong recommendations to revitalize the ALR.
- She noted concern about using ALR for cannabis facilities. An independent committee is doing a review and there will be a public engagement process.
- Every topic PAAC has noted needs to be included on the public survey.
<https://engage.gov.bc.ca/agriculturallandreserve/>
- Once the review is complete, there will be legislative and regulatory changes (October).
- There has been much discussion about changing the ALR back to one zone.
- The intent is to protect the ALR and encourage farming.

- The cost of farmland will be addressed in relation to the mega homes being built on ALR land. There needs to be control and hopefully these issues will be covered in the report.
- “Feed BC” is a provincial initiative to get more BC food into our hospitals and long-term care facilities. A pilot project will be announced for one hospital in the spring. She is working with the Minister of Health with a goal to increase local food consumption by 30% in these institutions; the Ministry is looking at similar models in Ontario and California.
- A food processing centre in BC will also be explored – perhaps at UBC - to turn primary products into processed foods, such as apples into applesauce. There will be opportunities through the province for smaller communities to participate with smaller processing hubs.
- “Buy BC” pins – a marketing programme started in the 90s and shelved in early 2000, could be reinstated, and it will be bigger than ever. Using the Buy BC brand through social media will be explored.
- Regarding the recent boycott of BC wines by Alberta, BC wines have been flying off the shelves and a “BC Wine Month” programme is proposed. The government does not plan on any form of retaliation against Alberta who will hopefully change their minds.

In response to the discussion points prepared by PAAC, Minister Popham stated:

Lack of adequate extension staff in the Ministry

- The Ministry is hiring a forage specialist as well as an organic specialist dedicated to organic growing. Salt Spring Island has a seed specialist. There are plans to set up an on-site network to connect municipalities to shared expertise.

Increased support for emerging areas (eg: grains)

- PAAC noted this goes beyond grains: chick peas, lentils, flax all use the same machinery. We have 300 acres of grains between Salt Spring Island and Sooke and there are issues with cleaning equipment; a central processing area with more sophisticated equipment would be an asset (the Sandown property was suggested).
 - There is a lot of potential for grain growth on the Island. The soils on the east side of Vancouver Island have been mapped and are very suitable for grains. We need to have an inventory of what type of soils grow grains well. Most of the wetlands are used for hay because farmers can't get on to the land in the early spring. Grains are planted in the fall and also act as a cover-crop to stop soil erosion.
 - The key is soil management and drainage: we need a soil specialist to provide advice to farmers.
 - There has also been some success with growing truffles on the Island and the Mainland – and they are worth thousands of dollars.

The Minister stated:

- If farmers have an idea about establishing a co-op, Ministry staff will help to create a financial plan and advise of funds that may be available to help with start up costs.
- She suggested having a panel of grain growers talking about what type of soils are best; the Ministry will help to organize this.
- Regarding truffles, it is proposed to plant up to 200 acres with hazelnut and filbert trees. She will speak to the District Agrologist re this issue.

Better geese and deer control programmes

PAAC has been dealing with this issue for many years. Culls are supported because the increasing populations do not have a quality of life and are starving.

We need the geese and deer to be culled to manageable numbers because they completely destroy crops, and some farmers no longer plant crops such as lettuce. Cover crops and grains are lost also.

A main part of the issue is farmers get bogged down by permits from all levels of government.

It is not just farmers and crops that are affected: it is schools, golf courses, beaches, parks, environmental and riparian areas as well as a serious safety issue at airports. It is a multi-ministry problem.

Discussion noted that the Ministry appointed two animal control people in the Okanagan as well as a person with the Wildlife Branch who would shoot deer to keep populations under control. In this area, we have a problem getting a dedicated team to addle eggs and shoot geese and it is a difficult thing for volunteers to do.

Jeff Weightman stated the CRD through the Management Steering Committee has tried to organize an egg-addling workshop; there has been very little interest. Some people get very emotional about it. Perhaps rather than the egg addling, we should pursue a cull later in the year.

Derek Masselink pointed out that the Parksville cull was very successful – between 500 and 600 birds - because they had a cooperative landowner. He believes this is a federal issue but all groups need to get together and take responsibility. This is a serious issue that is out of control.

The Minister stated:

- She supports a “food based” cull. This could be a provincial issue, or it could be pushed off to the municipalities.
- However, the Ministry could implement a cull and this will be a top priority issue for her.
- She acknowledged it will require getting all stakeholders to the table again and we need a collective decision.

Expansion of the farming base on Vancouver Island

Re the Site C Dam: PAAC noted that there is concern about the flooding of 10,000 acres of farmland.

- There is a lot of ALR land on the Island that is under-used – and at least 1/3 of this land is Class 4 or better. There is so much more potential for food growth.
- A pilot project was suggested to provide more support for opportunities for purchasing or leasing farmland on the Island. Intensive farming on the Island has a lot of potential.
- A major concern is getting organic matter and lime for our fields so we can expand our farmland base. We need good composting programmes on the Peninsula and to stop sending our organics over the Malahat for processing.

The Minister stated:

- The Ministry is supporting the Young Agrarians and matching young people to land; there has been a resurgence of young people wanting to farm.
- Vancouver Island is a smaller-scale compared to the mainland but we are looking at the co-op model for farms.
- There is a lot of potential on the Island, including crown lands up north that could be released.
- The 2010 recommendations from the ALC still hold true; the Ministry will build on this and re-establish a Revitalization Committee. Membership will include the former chair of the ALC, farmers and academics, who will work with local governments – and PAAC's ideas will be part of this too.

Provide on-going support for Farm Worker Housing

PAAC noted that according to feedback from farmers, there is no coordinated programme to support Farm Worker Housing (FWH). If the province provides some direction it would help.

The Minister stated:

- The Ministry is working with the Mexican Consulate for Foreign Workers as there have been some issues with FWH conditions being unsuitable. She has seen their report and there are more problem areas than we originally thought, although there are also examples of good FWH.
- The Consulate has provided some criteria. She is concerned if a resolution is not found we could lose the opportunity to bring foreign workers to the province. She agreed it is important to have standards. A meeting is scheduled in Vancouver in a couple of weeks and she will report back.

Support for building of agriculture infrastructure

We need infrastructure that supports new farming practices but these facilities and equipment can be very expensive. A suggestion is to have a co-op to share facilities and equipment with other farmers.

The Minister stated:

- Agreed this would be an excellent idea, particularly with grain processing. She suggested submitting a business proposal to the Ministry – there are staff who can help with business plans. She noted there is an agricultural hub proposed for the Quesnel and Cabiboo areas. Perhaps there could be a food innovation hub. There could be a lot of potential at such facilities, such as teaching people how to can and process fresh foods.

Support for Farm Water Supply & Subsidies

PAAC noted:

- if the plan is to increase farming and all land use, we will need more water. Currently farmers use 2.5% to 2.75% from CRD supplies. Private wells and ponds also provide irrigation.
- If the amount of farmland used increases, it may increase the use of CRD water to 8% or more – but this also translates into a large amount of food.
- The question is how much water do we need, and how do we get it? There are a number of techniques that fit with our Mediterranean-style water patterns, but we don't have a lot of water storage.
- Water retention in the soil can be an issue if there is insufficient organic matter or compost. With resilient soils farmers will be able to handle droughts. Important to have programmes about soil amelioration because our soils deplete over time. We need compost, organic matter and lime to support rebuilding our soils.
- Providing long term leases for farmland will provide incentive to do the necessary work to improve the soil.
- 80,000 tons of organic material from kitchen and yard waste is shipped out of the area; we only get about 3,000 tons back for use on parks and boulevards. Saanich spends \$4.5 million a year to ship waste to Cobble Hill.
- We need to consider options, such as a bio-gas composting plant, so we can retain the organic matter for our soils.
- The regulations regarding composting are excessive: eg. The material has to be covered, cement floors required to stop leaching. The municipalities need to get on board with composting; repeated requests by farmers on the Peninsula have not been approved.

The Minister agreed with the comments regarding the need for compost facilities, organic matter, and having long-term leases.

- It is obvious that farmers need organic matter and this falls under the mandate to revitalize the ALR.
- These issues have been brought to her attention before, as well as cement-based cannabis facilities. It is time to grandfather this and not allow any more cement buildings on ALR land.
- The bio-gas composting facility mentioned would require a cement-based building, as well as areas for transport, shipping and receiving.

PAAC noted that the sacrifice of a small amount of land to benefit the vast amount of ALR land that needs organic matter should be considered; such a facility could use low-quality farmland.

Locally Grown Fruit and Vegetables = Health Benefits

PAAC advised:

- 80% of type 2 diabetes, cardiac and respiratory issues, can be preventable, as well as 40% of cancers, by following a healthy diet that includes fruits and vegetables, no smoking and exercise. The medical system spends \$12 billion every year treating these diseases. The Ministries of Health and Agriculture should work together on this to promote the benefits of healthy eating.
- The Ministry of Agriculture gets one tenth of the budget that the Ministry of Forests receives. It is in the government's interest to increase the budget allocation to support our farmers.
- What about reinstating the Buy BC programme, and include nutritional information; or teach nutrition in schools? Last year, \$60,000 was received for the Farm to School Programme – it is very underfunded. There needs to be an educational component as well as “pop-up tents” in the summer, as a joint project with the Ministries of Education and Agriculture. What about composting of kitchen waste on school grounds, and using the compost on school vegetable gardens – providing an educational component.
- Noted using multi-media and social media to promote these initiatives would be well received by youth and young parents. There is huge opportunity here.

The Minister agreed, noting there is a connection between the Feed BC programme and partnering with the Ministry of Health. She is meeting with the Minister of Health next week and will discuss the points raised.

- She is working on bringing back the Buy BC programme, using ads and videos, and hoping to make it really “zippy” to grab people's attention. Pop up tents are a good suggestion.
- There will be continued funding for the Farm to School Programme.

Rebuild and fund a full agricultural programme at UBC

PAAC noted:

- We would like to see a revitalization and full support for soil science-based programmes at UBC's Faculty of Agriculture.
- With the introduction of the ALR in the early 70s and the subsequent mapping done, BC is now a magnificent province because of the protection of the ALR.
- There should be incentives to increase density to lessen the pressure on the ALR; it is important that municipalities be part of the solution. Considering the crowded conditions on the mainland, it is vital our municipal planners consider more comprehensive land use planning on the Island.

The Minister agreed, noting that the City of Langford has the most development pressure.

- This is why she wants to analyze the ALR land, do soil classifications, determine how much food we grow on the Island and how much could be grown.
- She is working with groups to match people to small plots of land. It is all part of the mandate to revitalize the ALR.

Discussion noted it is not a matter of density bonusing, but taking land speculation out of the equation. It is political will to stick to the plan: Density needs to be inside the Urban Containment Boundaries.

Saanich has recently adopted an RS-1 zone, a residential zone for smaller single family homes. Where there used to be two homes, there could now be six single family dwellings. This in turn protects agricultural lands.

The Minister agreed to a request that some PAAC members could meet to discuss the progress of these issues; she would also invite other senior staff and Deputy Ministers.

The Minister left the meeting.

CORRESPONDENCE

- PAAC letter to Stelly's School re Agricultural History Project – received for information
- PAAC letter to Saanich Council re Panama Flats – received for information
- PAAC letter to sponsoring Councils re Farm Worker Housing issues – received for information

BUSINESS ARISING

PAAC Historical Agriculture and Food Project: Nothing to add at this time.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – NEW

Agri-Tourism – Councillor Fred Haynes

- Saanich provides \$40,000 a year to Tourism Victoria & Sports Commission and Council recently invited the Director, Paul Nursey, to speak to them on possibilities for Agri Tourism for the region.
- Councillor Haynes suggested that PAAC may wish to invite Paul Nursey and members of his team to make a presentation on some high-level agri-tourism ideas for the region and Saanich Peninsula in particular, and have a conversation with the stakeholders in PAAC.
- Tourism Victoria works with Linda Geggie on the Farmer2Farmer workshop and the Flavour Trail.
- Perhaps Sandown may be a possible agri-tourism site?

Members agreed this was a good idea. The secretary will extend an invitation to Mr. Nursey.

2018 Winter Lecture Series – Review

Attendance was poor; half of those registered did not show. Those who did attend enjoyed Jack Mar's presentation which was preceded by a detailed presentation from Phil Christie and Bob Maxwell on the history of our soils, and followed by a good Q&A session. Thanks to Bev Marley who provided delicious refreshments.

Although information was sent out by email to many groups and contacts (estimated over 400 in total), it was agreed that more aggressive advertising was required through social media. Perhaps it was the time of the year or perhaps our farmers are receiving the assistance and information they need through other sources.

Only a few surveys have been returned. It was agreed to cancel the other 3 dates booked for February, March and April.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – CURRENT

a) Goose/Deer Management Strategy (Bev Marley/Jeff Weightman)

Jeff advised he has been contacted by only 3 farmers who have problems with nesting on their property. It is undecided at this time whether to proceed with the egg addling workshop or activate a cull. There is some funding to hire a consultant to teach the workshop. There are students wanting to learn but the problem is finding farmers with nesting problems. Farmers are definitely having problems with geese on their fields, but not so much the nesting. Information is available on-line about the proposed workshop.

Derek Masselink it is critical that the CRD stay involved. The benefit of addling eggs is that the geese then do not go anywhere else to nest. The point of the programme is that the geese still have eggs to sit on, but they don't hatch. Mowing the area is not a solution.

b) CRD Food & Agriculture Strategy - Linda Geggie

Jeff Weightman the Board is scheduled to have a meeting next week. It is hoped the CRD Board would grant permission to initiate a Food and Farmland Trust Feasibility Study at a cost of \$30,000. The Terms of Reference have recently been approved by the Planning and Protective Services Committee. If approved by the Board, a Request for Proposals will be prepared and go to the Task Force for review. Then hopefully it will proceed to the tender process with a September deadline to receive a report.

Drainage and Organics are on the list for discussion this year although he is unsure how much progress would be made. A series of workshops is proposed, funded by the CRD. A presentation will be made to the Task Force.

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

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

He advised that IPI held a meeting last week. They are considering a demonstration garden and workshops for large-scale land management. They are also visiting garden nurseries providing recommendations for plants that attract bees and other pollinators.

f) Sandown Update

Councillor Weisenberger stated that staff would not consider keeping the grandstand at the race track, as recommended by PAAC.

Linda Geggie advised that the District of North Saanich officially owns the property now and has a contract with Platform Properties to develop a commercial area and an agreement in place to demolish existing buildings, including the grandstand.

- There is a commitment to get the work completed within a certain time-frame but the weather has been challenging. There could be liability issues for the municipality if some of the buildings were retained. There will be an assessment of the barn buildings.

- The District has a team in place to develop a plan on governance as well as a long-term plan for the site. They have also agreed to hire an agrologist who will work with the developer and be involved in the long-term vision for Sandown. PAAC's letter and report to the District was received and considered. There is also an agreement with the ALC.

g) **BC Ferries/Livestock transportation issues**

Further to discussions at the last meeting, a letter was prepared to be sent to BC Ferries and senior government representatives regarding the shipment of livestock between the mainland and the island. This letter was not sent as it appears some solutions have been found.

Dianne Williamson reported that over the past few weeks she and Derek Masselink have had discussions with BC Ferries and a mutual understanding has been reached on how to move forward.

- One of the issues was bookings could only take place during the calendar year – set from January to December, which did not help her when trying to make reservations for January. BC Ferries is working on these glitches.
- There was concerns expressed by one of the chicken growers because we didn't go through them with the problem but she has the only poultry farm that uses the Swartz Bay terminal – the others use Duke Point. The BC Chicken Growers were supportive however.

Derek Masselink stated he felt there was a lack of appreciation for Firbank Farm's situation; he didn't think BC Ferries was aware of the glitches and the hardship on the poultry and other animals. Also, because the Island is a major tourist destination blocks of tour buses book passage on the ferries, leaving less room for large trucks.

AGRICULTURAL STRATEGY – SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS

a) **Water (Michael Doehnel)**

The Sooke Dam was full in November. Because of the dry summer, it took a long time for the ground to soak up moisture and saturate the soils.

b) **Farm Economics (Terry Michell) – not present**

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

Larry Sluggett stated he met last Saturday with Councillor Jenson, Darren Michell, and Jack Mar regarding Maber Flats. Central Saanich has information on its website indicating that the water problem has been solved by adding ditches. He would like to receive an update from the Agricultural Committee. Phil Christie noted that adding berms was the wrong solution; the Big O drains are old and plugged – perhaps some new drains would work better.

Councillor Holman stated the Watershed Committee has received some updates about Maber Flats and there will be a report to Council on the work completed to date. Consultants have been hired to start design work and to bring all stakeholders together. From the first stage results, it seems they cannot meet the Terms of Reference with the land and the size of the drainage facility needed. Perhaps down-stream improvements may need to be considered. She agreed the Stakeholders Group needs to be informed about what is happening.

Derek Masselink asked to be included in discussions regarding Maber Flats.

d) Education and Outreach (Linda Geggie)

Linda distributed programmes for the Farmer2Farmer event on March 2nd and thanked PAAC for their contribution. She wondered if PAAC would like to make a presentation at the event on who PAAC is and what they do. She expects 100-150 attendees. She also mentioned it would be nice to have some PAAC brochures on hand. Isobel offered to arrange.

Phil Christie said he would be willing to help but at this time is not sure of his work schedule. He will be in touch with Linda.

Linda advised she is planning to do a presentation to Saanich Council to congratulate them on their draft Agriculture and Food Strategy and to talk about agriculture in general. She noted she could present the 2017 Annual Report at that time as well.

Linda reminded PAAC that we have the municipal elections this October and we normally organize a farm tour for new councillors the following spring (2019). Councillor Holman suggested the tour could branch out into the agri-tourism sector, as well as farm economics, health and education.

Linda writes a column in the Saanich News every couple of weeks and mentioned that if PAAC has any issues or upcoming events they want to broadcast to let her know.

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

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