



**MINUTES OF THE
PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
Committee Room 2, Saanich Municipal Hall
Thursday, SEPTEMBER 13, 2018 AT 7:00 PM**

Present: Phil Christie in the Chair; Jack Mar, Co-Chair; Carol Davidson, Treasurer; Satnam Dheenshaw; Bev Marley; Linda Geggie; Larry Kimmett; Larry Sluggett; Dianne Williamson. Councillors Weisenberger (North Saanich) and Robin Tunnecliffe, Metchosin. Also present was Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Clerk.

Guests: Bob Maxwell; Jeff Weightman, CRD; Michael Doehnel; Doug Pepper, Regional Agrologist and Ray Galey.

Regrets: Terry Michell

Minutes: The Minutes of June 14, 2018 were adopted as circulated.

The Secretary advised that Larry Kimmett has now officially been appointed as a PAAC member. Doug Pepper, Regional Agrologist was welcomed and general introductions were made around the table.

TREASURER'S REPORT – Carol Davidson reported PAAC currently has \$22,757.17 in the bank in term deposits. She recently transferred \$1000 into the chequing account to cover Saanich Fair expenses.

SPEAKER'S BUREAU: none scheduled this month.

The Chair stated:

- Members were asked at the last meeting to think about the direction PAAC should take, what are the key issues on which to focus our attention. (*note: see last page of minutes for full list of topics suggested throughout the meeting*)
- He suggested holding **a one-day forage workshop** and noted there is a new provincial forage specialist. There can be a misunderstanding on the importance of forage and hay in agriculture; horses are a fundamental part of soil health and permaculture. Although millions of dollars' worth of hay is being harvested, he felt the quality was very low. Some members disagreed with this comment.
- Phil explained that often hay can be poorly grown, harvested too late, or cut too close the ground, which is why he would like to offer a workshop on this.

Jack Mar suggested some of the farmers on PAAC and perhaps a few others should get together over the winter and host **a workshop on growing varieties of fruit and vegetables**, looking at production levels and profit margins for the various crops and determine the best crops and/or varieties to produce in this area.

- Discussion noted production costs would be higher for certified organics, and synthetic fertilizers vs. organic fertilizers. Organic matter is declining on BC farms, whereas it is increasing on the Prairies.

Ray Galey stated:

- Farmers are suffering not only from **crop damage caused by wildlife**, but also lower costs on wholesale produce. Consumers with families to feed are conscious of dollar value of fresh meat and produce.
- Before the Egg Marketing Board came into being, there were many small poultry growers, but not any more due to quotas. All the major dairy farms are in Vancouver.
- He recently lost \$60,000 worth of potatoes due to damage from geese; he estimated he saw about 300 geese over a period of 2 days on his fields. In Saanich, he has to call the police every time he wants to use a scare gun – but even scare guns don't work - they just push the geese from one field to another.
- Central Saanich allows farmers to use hunters; this is not possible in Saanich.
- He also recently lost 200 strawberry plants because of geese. Something has to be done.
- The public has no comprehension about the damage that has been caused by geese and if they fully understood it they would stop buying locally farmed produce.
- Farming is no longer sustainable. Not only because of the continued crop damage and losses but also because he has no **on-farm accommodations**. He recently had to send four workers home.

***Mr. Galey left the meeting at 7:30 p.m. ***

General discussion ensued:

- Re the geese issue: we have been at a crisis level for some time. Although progress with the help of the CRD and in part the province, it is not enough. The Chair noted this is a critical issue that needs to be brought back once again. We need to do what we can to help farmers like Ray Galey before they give up entirely.
- With respect to the current **provincial review of the ALR**, PAAC should consider lobbying the province on the current **threshold level for farm status**. This is a big problem on the mainland: people buy small plots of farmland, lease it to local farmers and acquire farm status. This is a mis-use of farmland.
- There have been discussions about raising the threshold up to as high as \$5000 from the current \$2500. The concern with making the level too high is that good farmland could be taken out of production. Lower rates encourage small-scale farms.
- This is an election year, we will have some new councillors and decision-makers and we need to educate the newcomers on the serious farming issues with another **farm tour**. These have been very successful in the past.
- **Farm Worker Housing/Accommodations** is an important topic that needs to be addressed.
- Considering the **escalating prices of farmland, food, farmland trusts and land banks** for long-term lease to farmers should be a discussion topic.

Cameron Scott, Saanich Planner, entered the meeting at 7:45 pm

CORRESPONDENCE:

- Letter to Minister of Agriculture regarding ALR regulations, further to discussions at the June 14, 2018 meeting.

- Letter of support to Saanich Council re size and location of homes on ALR lands.

Both items were received for information.

PAAC HISTORICAL AGRICULTURE & FOOD PROJECT - Update

Linda Geggie stated:

- PAAC had been discussing a way to capture some of the stories from long-time farmers and celebrate the history of farming.
- Further to discussions at the beginning of the summer with Black Press, we were able to use their resources to produce a four page insert in the Peninsula News, Saanich News and Goldstream News at the end of August.
- Buckerfields was also a sponsor and PAAC contributed \$1200 towards the project.
- Black Press took photos and conducted interviews – captured on video – of 6 farmers: Jack Mar, Vern/Terry Michell, John Pendray, Rob Galey, Robin Tunnecliffe and Erin Bett.
- These inserts were made available at the Saanich Fair and the remainder will be distributed to various farm markets throughout the municipalities of Saanich, Central Saanich, North Saanich and Metchosin.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – NEW

Suggested the Commission keep a watch on the **cannabis industry** in light of the upcoming legalization. The Chair asked if anyone was willing to take on this task and it is very likely that PAAC may be asked by the local municipalities to provide comment once cannabis farms start to appear.

- Discussion noted that in Washington State, the anticipated price of \$8/gram has now been reduced to \$2/gram.
- The Regional Agrologist, Doug Pepper, noted that the ALC in conjunction with current ALR regulations is making sure that the definition of a “cannabis farm” is clearly defined and that the Right to Farm Act is applied. Federal rules and regulations also apply with respect to greenhouse construction. Doug offered to send some information to PAAC and provide a report on the status. He noted that growing cannabis is the same as growing other vegetable crops as long as the grower follows federal regulations.
- PAAC noted that over-production is likely, with the price falling and small growers going out of business.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – CURRENT

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

Jeff Weightman advised that during the summer months, the Province supported conservation and ecological restoration activities to mitigate the economic impacts due to Canada geese on the Peninsula. No official report has been issued on this yet. There are some new population numbers that isolate the Canada Geese count which he will send to the secretary.

PAAC discussion noted the following:

- Phil Christie stated he had a flock of between 40 and up to 300 geese on his Old West Saanich Road property.

- Hazing does not solve the problem: it just moves the geese from one property to another.
- Culls are the answer but there are so many restrictions they are not very effective; only about 40 geese were culled a few years ago.
- As we have been saying for many years, we have to get public support for culls in order to help farmers like Ray Galey who continually experience crop losses. We should not be hiding culls from the public; farmers should not have to have a hidden agenda to protect their farms.
- We have to start moving forward on this issue. It was one of the points noted on PAAC's response to the CRD's *Food & Lands Improvement Feasibility Study* (August 2018) regarding Land Protocols, suggesting that local certified hunters, hunting groups and First Nations hunters be used to control deer and geese populations where it can be legally and safely done.
- It is important we get a quantitative estimate of the goose population and/or flock identification.

The Regional Agrologist stated the *Agriculture Wildlife Programme* can provide farmers with compensation for damages caused by wildlife, including bears, deer, elk and waterfowl. There is also assistance for fencing. He suggested **Tyler Morrow would be a good speaker on this topic**. The secretary will follow up on this suggestion.

b) CRD Food & Agriculture Strategy - Linda Geggie

PAAC wrote a letter to the CRD in 2017 regarding the strategy and since then the CRD has put forward an RFP for a consultant to look at the different land access strategies and provide a business case for the Food and Farmland Trust option.

The report is now complete and will go back to the Task Force for discussion, and then to the Planning and Protective Services Committee on September 26th.

The CRD Board felt the initial business case presented should be more concise. The consultant will re-work the report which will be considered by the Board early next year.

At the request of Jeff Weightman to receive input from the farming community, over the summer the Co-Chairs prepared detailed comments on the current report. Phil Christie noted this is an important document and there is good information provided, but it needs some tweaking. Unfortunately, there wasn't time to get input from the entire Commission, so it is a good thing that now the process is not being rushed. This will allow time for the document, and the Co-Chairs' comments, to be circulated the Commission for more in depth discussion.

Jeff noted the Task Force will also be reviewing the document again.

- Members include farmers from the Westshore, Peninsula and urban areas, planners from municipalities with farmland, as well as representatives from Victoria, Island Health and First Nations. He would appreciate PAAC's comments on the current report.
- In terms of land options for farmland trusts, he noted there are 3 potential sites: Panama Flats, Maber Flats and Sandown. All 3 of these areas are considered in the report.
- With upcoming fall election, all Boards and Committees stand down; the Task Force will have one last meeting before the election.

c) Saanich Agriculture and Food Security Plan – Cameron Scott, Saanich Planner

The Plan is proceeding to Council on Monday, September 17, 2018 for review. This was the Plan that PAAC provided comments on last November, only a few housekeeping changes have been made.

- Staff are recommending a half-time Food Systems Planner for a two-year period.
- There are a number of key items the Plan addresses, such as implementation of a concept plan for Panama Flats, as well as setting priorities for the next 10 to 15 years.

In response to a question from PAAC the current lack of support Saanich Council has shown towards agriculture in Saanich and whether this Plan could be a catalyst to start to move things forward, the Planner stated he has been talking to Ray Galey about his problems, and many Council members have expressed an interest in agricultural issues – such as farm worker housing. This Plan provides some clarity moving forward, although he noted it will be hard to determine and prioritize the key actions as there are so many. PAAC suggested it would be helpful to have other municipalities and senior planning staff review the Plan.

On a positive note, since Minister Popham attended the PAAC meeting at the beginning of the year, there has been a representative from the Ministry of Agriculture at PAAC meetings. This is encouraging.

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

- Bob noted that as pollinators can spend 80% of their life cycle in the soil, maintaining and increasing our hedgerows is very beneficial.
- On October 7 at Welland Orchard there is a Show and Tell workshop planned between noon and 2:00 pm on how to identify bees.
- Plants noted for attracting bees and pollinators include flax, phacelia and mustard. All these plants generate lots of seeds as well.

e) Sandown Update – Linda Geggie

- The new Canadian Tire store, built on the 12-acre, industrial zoned strip at Sandown is almost ready to open.
- She has finalized the Vision Sandown report, which North Saanich Council recently voted to move ahead to the next stage in the plan. Remediation is underway. The outbuildings have been demolished and the limestone removed from the track. Of the 83 acre-site, 76 acres is scheduled for agricultural production.
- The Plan is scheduled for Council on Monday September 17; details are posted on the North Saanich website.
- The focus will be on the site plan, governance plan and financial sustainability plan.
- There could be up to 17 farmers working the land with the ability for parcels up to 10 acres as well as smaller parcels of between 2 and 6 acres.
- There will also be a farm school and a small area set aside for community gardens.
- A community trail for walking and equestrian use will be installed around the perimeter of the site.
- She thanked PAAC for giving up their time and providing valuable input to the process.
- North Saanich will not manage the site; it will be leased to a society who will in turn lease to individual farmers. The cost of the lease will be determined by the amount of infrastructure required – generally water, power, fences, etc.
- Housing is a huge issue: One building is being proposed for farmer housing.
- General discussion noted it was unfortunate that the outbuildings on the site could not have been preserved, but Linda advised there were mold and seismic issues at stake.

Councillor Weisenberger stated he would like to see PAAC review and comment on the proposed plan.

In response to a comment about the cost to the North Saanich taxpayers, Linda noted that 50% of the infrastructure costs will be covered by Canadian Tire taxes. It is expected that within 10 years, the Sandown property will be able to pay for itself.

AGRICULTURAL STRATEGY – SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS

a) Water (Michael Doehnel)

- Unfortunately the Saanich Peninsula Waste Water Committee meeting planned for today was canceled and therefore he doesn't have any up to date stats on water usage.
- He anticipates the numbers will be high again because of the hot, dry summer, although the September rains came early.
- He has an artesian well on his property which did not drop as low this year.
- The reservoir is in good shape. The Board wants to have at least two years' worth of water stored in the reservoir.
- He will provide a more detailed report at the next meeting.
- The interest payments for the purchase of the Leach Watershed should end this year reducing the infrastructure costs.
- Farmers are still using just 2.5%, whereas 8% of water is lost through leakage.

PAAC discussion noted concern about water quality and too much sediment. Water pressure is also an issue in some areas on the Peninsula. Dianne Williamson noted that Island View Road area is particularly bad. She has to change her water filter every 18 hours; this is very costly but necessary because she has to provide clean water to the chickens and provide a water sample twice a year to M & B Labs. Flushing the lines in the late winter and early spring is not sufficient.

The Regional Agrologist stated that water quality is now a federal issue that is monitored by Environment.

Michael Doehnel stated the issue of water quality and pressure has been discussed many times. Although the CRD owns the main water lines, it is the individual municipalities who are responsible. He agreed that water pressure is definitely an issue.

b) Farm Economics (Terry Michell – not present)

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

δ) Education and Outreach (Linda Geggie)

Linda stated with this year being an election year we should start to think about a farm tour. She suggested this topic be added to the next agenda.

- The Island Agriculture Show is planned for February 2019 at the Fairgrounds. She questioned whether we should go ahead with the regular Farmer2Farmer workshop, which is also normally held in February, or would this be redundant because of the Ag Show?
- Many growers struggled this year due to the dry and hot conditions and she wondered if we should look at providing **technical information on climate change adaptation**

strategies at the Ag Show, or perhaps tying this in with a forage workshop. Noted there are many local specialists who can speak to climate change adaptation.

The Regional Agrologist stated the Ministry of Agriculture is involved in the Island Ag Show and would be happy to collaborate on something. He will contact Linda to discuss.

Carol Davidson noted that Washington State University ran a successful Cattleman's workshop with speakers from the University. There would be 15 different topics offered, with 3 running at the same time so people could select which ones they were interested in. It was a good format. Up to 500 people attended each year.

OTHER:

Summary of suggested topics for discussion, workshop, speakers, etc.

- **Speaker:** Tyler Morrow, Agricultural Wildlife Programme, Ministry of Agriculture.
 - Compensation for crop damage
 - Culls & public education re Canada Geese

- Water quality and pressure on the Peninsula
- Farm Tour 2019 for new councillors and municipal staff
- Farm Worker Accommodations
- Escalating prices of farmland
- Farmland Trusts & land banks
- Farm Sales Tax rates
- Watchdog – Cannabis Industry Growth

- **Workshops:**
 - Forage
 - Climate change & adaptation
 - Most product varieties of fruits and vegetables to grow; best profit margins

Adjournment: On a Motion from Carol Davidson, the meeting adjourned at 9:10 pm

Next Meeting: The next PAAC meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, October 11, 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.
