



**MINUTES OF THE
PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
Committee Room 2, Saanich Municipal Hall
Thursday, NOVEMBER 14, 2019 AT 7:00 PM**

Present: Jack Mar in the Chair; Larry Kimmett, Bev Marley; Terry Michell, Larry Sluggett, Dianne Williamson; Councillors Graham (C.Saanich), Brice (Saanich) and Smyth (N.Saanich). Also present was Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Clerk.

Guests: Bob Maxwell, Mike Doehnel, Chris Wieczorek, Executive Assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Jeff Weightman, CRD.

Regrets: Satnam Dheenshaw, Larry Kimmett, Carol Davison, Robin Tunnicliffe, Linda Geggie, Phil Christie

Minutes: The Minutes of October 10, 2019 were adopted.

TREASURER'S REPORT – Carol Davidson – not present. The secretary reported that the balance in the chequing account is \$1,596, with \$20,006 in a Term Deposit.

SPEAKER'S BUREAU:

Two speakers from the CRD were scheduled for tonight's meeting, providing updates on the Elk/Beaver Lake initiative and the Solid Waste Management Plan, but unfortunately both were ill and unable to attend. They will be rescheduled for a future meeting.

CORRESPONDENCE:

- a) Letter dated October 25, 2019 to Central Saanich Council suggesting changes about leasing Newman Farm as part of the proposed CRD Food and Farmland Trust. PAAC passed a Motion at the October meeting supporting the concept, and recommending a change to give preference for subleases to “new” farmers, rather than “young” farmers.
- b) Letter from Natasha Caverley, Farmlands (Greater Victoria) Society requesting financial assistance in order to continue its programming and initiatives at Newman Farm.

Discussion noted the following:

- Central Saanich Council recently granted \$10,000 for operations to Newman Farm, which is operated by Farmlands Trust. It was made clear to the non-profit group that this was a one-year donation. All goods produced at the farm are donated to non-profit societies such as Our Place. There are no sales.
- PAAC does not generate funds itself, and we do not provide grants to other organizations. The funds we do have, generously donated to PAAC by the Fruit Growers Association, are to be used for educational purposes, such as hosting workshops, seminars, or speakers.
- No specific amount has been requested.
- The letter indicates that PAAC has assisted financially in the past, but members have no recollection of this. PAAC has provided volunteer or in-kind contributions.

- Farmlands Trust won a national award last year for their contribution to providing food for pollinators by planting over two acres of sunflowers and other flowers to attract bees.
- Their Annual Report indicates food produced had a value of \$38,148.
- Members were divided on whether to give a one-time donation, noting it could turn into an annual request.

MOTION: Moved by Larry Kimmett and Seconded by Larry Sluggett: "That PAAC provide a one-time donation of \$200 to the Farmlands Trust (Greater Victoria) Society."
 DEFEATED, with 3 members voting against.

Discussion continued, with some members indicating that rather than cash, they would gladly donate seeds or something specific to help with growing crops, which in turn would result in thousands of dollars in product. It was pointed out that they cannot grow vegetables because there are no laborers to harvest the produce.

It was suggested we invite Farmlands Trust to a future meeting to better explain their request and determine if there is a non-monetary way that PAAC could assist.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – CURRENT

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

Jeff Weightman stated:

- It is planned to expand permitting this year to hunt geese, particularly around Elk Lake and Royal Road areas.
- A winter count will be done in February.
- He has heard nothing about deer lately although he understands there has been some hunting pressure on Mayne Island.
- There was also some talk about local Mayors meeting with the Ministers of Forests and Agriculture, but that was not successful.

Some members reported that they have less geese than past years, whereas others have noted over 1,000 on their property. It was thought the dry fall weather may have had something to do with lower numbers. The west side of the Peninsula seems to have more geese. The deer population appears to be decreasing, although many have been seen on Galey's property in Saanich at Sandown.

b) CRD Food & Agriculture Strategy (Linda Geggie & Jeff Weightman) - nothing to report

c) Saanich Agriculture and Food Security Plan – nothing to report

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

Bob stated he does not attend the meetings any more. IPI is still active and doing good work. Their primary activity is working with schools and environmental groups. He noted there has been no activity on the Peninsula lately and he didn't know to what degree municipalities want to help with planting pollinator-friendly flowers.

e) Sandown Update (Brett Smyth)

- Council directed North Saanich staff to enter into preliminary discussions with two potential parties, and it possible that two operators will share the site.
- Some 30 acres of the land is heavily forested and it does not make sense to farm that area.

- Options are being explored that involve sale of some of the property, or leasing to the Farmlands Trust programme.
- Due to potential risks involved, the District doesn't want to manage the site. The successful applicant or applicants will be responsible for operation costs.
- The developers of the commercial space adjacent to the Pat Bay Highway are having difficulty leasing the remainder two-thirds of the site. Canadian Tire is the only occupant presently. The expectation was that \$200,000 would be coming annually to the agricultural fund for the Sandown property; it is less than half of that now.

f) Farmworker Accommodations

Councillor Graham stated Central Saanich is moving ahead with the proposed bylaw to permit farmworker accommodations. It will be up to the province as to how much accommodation they will permit on a farm.

- There is concern about the permanency of any accommodations, and the policing of same, if necessary. Again, this will be up to the province. Anticipated enforcement will be a complaint based process rather than regular monitoring.
- He noted the province has amended the application a number of times; the issue appears to be a prickly one for them. At the same time, Newman Farm and the Farmlands Trust (Greater Victoria) Society donate to Our Place and need more labor. It would be beneficial if we could use people who are homeless to work on the farms in exchange for housing.

Discussion noted that the ALC are very short-staffed. It is very rare now for commissioners to visit the Island and they are very slow to respond to inquiries.

- Also, the new rules that came out this past spring resulted in more regulations and inspections to address. Farmers don't have increased "staff" to look after these changes.
- Some members attended the meeting a few months ago at the Central Saanich Firehall with staff and the ALC, where it was acknowledged that there was not enough ALC staff to handle the workload and applications are taking too long to address.
- Part of the general provincial image of the ALC is how well it functions. Its reputation was good at one time – effective, fast-moving, and they got the work done.
- We need to take this opportunity to get the ALC moving in the right direction again, make it effective and productive, which in turn will strengthen the ALR and agriculture into the future.
- If that means more money to stop the revolving door, then it is a good use of the province's money to support the future of agriculture and make sure that the ALC continues to be a valuable and useful organization.
- Suggested the specifications be calculated to support an agrologist for the Island – a "boots on the ground" person to help the farmers. It seems the farmland is protected, but nothing is done to support the farmers who work the land.
- Perhaps we need to approach our municipalities - if we can provide a clear list of what we need and how much it would cost, they may agree to write to the province, or meet with the Minister and the ALC to discuss agricultural support for the region.
- Questioned what financial and professional support other areas of the province receive.

Chris Wieczorek stated Bills 52 and 15 deal with these issues.

- Longview Farms have applied for 74-79 units of housing on their property; his understanding is that the ALC have now approved that application, although it has been modified somewhat.
- He will bring these concerns to the Minister's attention. The ALC has had a budget increase to hire staff to handle complaints and enforcement.
- He noted that a number of agricultural positions were eliminated throughout the province.
- He will report back to the Commission.

The Chair suggested that members give this discussion some thought and we can brainstorm in the New Year, submitting PAAC's concerns and potential solutions in writing to the Minister and the municipalities.

AGRICULTURAL STRATEGY – SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS

a) Water (Michael Doehnel)

- Referring to the letter sent this summer to the CRD about the inconsistency in municipal water rate charges, he stated this matter was raised at the Regional Water Supply Commission meeting a couple of weeks ago.
- The letter has been referred to the Water Advisory Committee. However, WAC has cut back on its meetings and are looking for new members. January is the next scheduled meeting and he will wait to hear from them.
- He noted that the CRD seemed reluctant to look at the matter because the request did not initially come from a municipality. Unless we want to push ahead on this, the matter will just be “in the system”.
- The reason we started this process was because Saanich farmers were having to pay for water up-front and not getting their refund back for a year. Other municipalities do not require their farmers to do this. It would be so much better to get everyone on the same page with a uniform approach.

b) Farm Economics (Terry Michell)

- This year saw a strong, good quality, berry crop.
- Hay also did well, with some areas doing a 4th cut.
- The dry summer resulted in lots of irrigation for the hay.
- The quality of vegetables on the Peninsula was excellent.
- Consumers request local produce from their grocery store.
- There was mildew due to fluctuations in temperature in August/September.
- A wet September resulted in crops being harvested in the mud, but 99% of the crops were harvested.

c) Agricultural Land Base (Phil Christie) - not present

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

PAAC MEMBERSHIP

New members are needed. The secretary will send information to the municipalities to post on websites. Members were asked to submit the names of any prospective members.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

- PAAC Christmas Gathering: Thursday, December 5, 2019, 6pm, 2070 Amelia Avenue. The secretary will contact everyone regarding what to bring to contribute to the dinner.
- ABBOTSFORD AGRICULTURAL SHOW: January 30, 2020. Registration is \$90. Many different seminars to attend.

- **MEETING TIMES – CHANGE BACK TO 7:30 PM**
Due to a conflict with another Saanich Committee Meeting, it was agreed to change the meeting time back to 7:30 pm from 7:00 p.m.

Adjournment: On a Motion from Bev Marley, the meeting adjourned at 8:37 pm

Next Meeting: The next PAAC meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, January 9, 2020, at 7:30 pm**

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