



**MINUTES OF THE
PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
Committee Room 2, Saanich Municipal Hall
Thursday, June 13, 2019 AT 7:00 PM**

Present: Phil Christie in the Chair; Jack Mar, Co-Chair; Carol Davidson, Treasurer; Linda Geggie; Larry Kimmett; Bev Marley; Larry Sluggett; Dianne Williamson; Councillor Smith (North Saanich). Also present was Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Clerk.

Guests: Michael Doehnel; Henry Lee, CRD; Spring Harrison; Neil Findlow, Saanich Planner; Chris Wieczorek, Executive Assistant to the Minister of Agriculture; Doug Pepper, Regional Agrologist; Amanda Parnham and Heidi Hartman, BC Housing, Melissa Lacroix, AgSafe BC.
Attending re the Marsett Road Application: Thomas Elliot, Madrone Environment Services; Norm James; Ross Blackwell, Consultant; Rob Cvitanovic, Megan Byers, and Dwayne Walbaum, Developers; and residents Sharon Ferris, Dennis Grimmer, Art and Jan Roberts.

Regrets: Satnam Dheenshaw, Terry Michell, Robin Tunnicliffe. Councillors Brice and Graham.

Minutes: The Minutes of May 9, 2019 were adopted.

TREASURER'S REPORT – Carol Davidson

- No significant changes to report; cheques still not received from CR-Fair and Farm Credit Canada re the Farm Succession Workshop.

SPEAKER'S BUREAU:

Woodwyn Farms Update - Amanda Parnham and Heidi Hartman, BC Housing

Heidi Hartman stated:

- BC Housing has been working closely with local farmers in Central Saanich and appreciate being able to provide opportunities to people with mental health and addiction problems as part of their recovery therapy.
- Our commitment to the community is for the farm to be a community resource.
- The project is in a holding pattern right now, but capital upgrades are underway, and the site is being maintained.
- Earlier this year, Victoria Cool Aid prepared a 3-4-week work programme for cleaning up the site and a garage sale was held.
- BC Housing is excited about the opportunity to start a non-profit and employment programme at Woodwyn.
- Woodwyn maintains its own water rights; we have not applied to the CRD for water. PAAC noted it may take up to a year after they apply to get potable water on-site.
- The west barn will receive a new roof. A structural report on the east barn recommends it be demolished; no decision has been made yet.
- No firm decisions have been made yet about what crops to grow – other than hay and grains that are being grown by the farmer currently leasing the property.
- Apparently, there is a problem with Wildworm on the property, which can be very damaging to crops if not treated. PAAC provided some suggestions, such as growing above-ground crops rather than root crops, noting it could take 4 or 5 years to get the problem under control.

- Until we know more about farming, no new equipment will be purchased.
- To date we have not consulted with the Ministry of Agriculture.
- It was never our intention to have other people living on the property or to have housing built on the property.
- Before purchasing the property, BC Housing visited the site many times and saw the opportunity for a work programme, with the intention to preserve the farm rather than it being developed.

Amanda Parnham stated:

- The farm has been leased to a local farmer with lots of experience.
- Grains, hay and barley have been planted; one crop has been harvested already.
- Woodwyn Farms looks better now than it has for the past 19 years and we have come a long way since BC Housing first purchased the property.
- A caretaker is living on site; one of his bigger projects is developing a peace garden. The agreement with the caretaker has been extended to March 2020.
- A greenhouse has been taken down as it wasn't structurally sound.

The Chair thanked Ms. Parnham and Ms. Hartman for their presentation and requested that they provide monthly updates as plans progress. He also noted that PAAC is aware of the complexities of managing a government owned farm given all the various stakeholders but that the commission has a big place for Woodwyn Farm their hearts.

Ag Safe BC - Melissa LaCroix

Melissa stated she is the regional consultant for Vancouver Island for Ag Safe BC, which offers respiratory protection for common airborne hazards on farms. She displayed some equipment examples.

- Dusts, pesticides, disinfectants, and gas fumes are some of the hazards experienced.
- Exposure can happen quickly, especially when working in enclosed spaces.
- AgSafe BC can make sure you wear the correct respiratory mask and that it is properly fitted in accordance with BC standards and regulations.

Environmental Protection of Wastewater & Drinking Water: Henry Lee, CRD

Henry stated:

- Two areas have an agricultural connection: Drinking water protection and a cross connection programme to protect water supplies.
- Over the last five years, the CRD has been looking at water for industrial use, manufacturing and restaurants. Now we are also looking at the agricultural community, wells and retention ponds.
- There is also a watershed protection programme for Elk/Beaver Lake. Phosphorus has been an issue, causing green algae blooms. The CRD has reached out to the stakeholders in the Elk/Beaver Lake area and are considering developing an initiative.
- We would like PAAC to play a role in this initiative, getting the farm community involved and he would like some feedback on how to proceed.
- Watersheds will be monitored: depending on the impact on the lake shoreline monitoring could be every year or every 5 years. Standard testing will be done for bacteria and metals.
- He will bring some specific issues for PAAC to consider at the September meeting. Perhaps one or more of the PAAC members would join the stakeholders/consultant's group.

The Chair noted that recently implemented environmental protection regulations now require farmers to take samples for nitrates every 3 years and that if you have a farm over 50 ha, you have to sample every year to prove you are not overfertilizing and polluting nearby aquifers and other waterbodies with fertilizers. He also mentioned that the farm community is going to want to work with the CRD to have an understanding of the issue.

CARRY TO SEPTEMBER

540 MARSETT PLACE, ALR EXCLUSION APPLICATION

This proposal was discussed briefly at the May meeting. PAAC, having just received detailed information from Saanich Planning and the Consultant with respect to previously requested soil analysis and agricultural assessment, asked for time to review the material and provide comments at the June meeting.

Neil Findlow, Saanich Planner, the owners & applicants and a few neighbours were present. Letters received from area residents and copied to the PAAC members.

The Chair provided a brief overview, noting that the report prepared by Thomas Elliot, professional agrologist, will be considered by the ALC and recommendations will be made by the ALC staff on the technical merits of the land.

- He noted that PAAC is an advisory body and should no longer make recommendations on ALR exclusions to Council or the ALC. The purpose of this meeting will be to hear comments from PAAC members and others at the meeting and pass those comments along to Saanich Council. The municipality and ALC can then make their decisions regarding land use based on the reports that have been completed including agricultural capabilities of the site.
- The provincial government passed legislation in February 2019 changing the mandate of the ALC and the submissions they will accept from professionals;
- The author of the technical report, Dr. Thomas Elliot, P.Ag. has provided his findings and conclusions, but consistent with the new legislation he has not given any recommendations.
- As a professional agrologist, he (the Chair) cannot be involved in recommendations to exclude this land from the ALR; it is a professional ethics issue. Based on the information before us, it is a technical matter. If he stays in the meeting we can only make comments about the land use issue to Saanich Council. If PAAC decides it wants to make a recommendation, he would have to step out of the meeting.

The Saanich Planner stated:

- Comments from PAAC will be included in a comprehensive report from the Planning Department addressing the agricultural and technical components, as well as the broader issue of land use in the context of existing Council policies in the Official Community Plan.
- The report will include a number of options and recommendations, and the decision is Council's:
 - o Council may refuse to provide a resolution to the ALC, in which case the application does not proceed;
 - o Council may forward the application to the ALC without a recommendation, or with a recommendation in support, or a recommendation in opposition.
- The issue of agricultural land quality will not go away; the Local Area Plan, valid until 2021, supports agricultural use of this property.

- Council has however adopted a new Official Community Plan; the LAP takes precedence over the OCP and has policies to allow consideration of urban development, the OCP takes a different approach.

Individual PAAC member comments noted as follows:

- It would be beneficial for the Commission to reach a consensus on this proposal as our mandate is to support agriculture, even though members may have different perspectives.
- PAAC had previously asked for the soil analysis and technical report; our comments may not be of a technical nature but rather on the overall application.
- It is not fundamentally democratic to keep the question of community land use and the technical issues separate. We cannot abrogate our responsibility to the community.
- PAAC has an advisory function above and beyond the technical aspects of the issue and it cannot be divorced from the context of the land use and the surrounding areas.
- The report states the land is unusable ("it is our professional opinion that developing and implementing an economic-scale farm plan for food-crop production on the Property's ALR land would not be viable" for agriculture, yet there are many farms in the surrounding area.

Comments from area residents:

- The analysis was not based on all the sites on the property and therefore the conclusion is incomplete.
- The land has been manipulated due to its past use as a golf course, but it was famed for decades previously.
- Soil can be remediated; there are lots of other aspects to farming other than tilling the soil and many things can be farmed on lower class soils.
- The report's analysis is based on standard farm operations; there are many non-standard options.
- Another concern is an application to remove this much land from the ALR should have a concept plan of what is being proposed; the residents do not have this information.
- It is understood there is a growing demand for community gardens and small lot farms in Saanich and this property could add to food security for the region.
- Some of the conclusions in the report are not based on strong data.

Ross Blackwell stated he had worked for the ALC for ten years.

- This is not a decision about future land use: it is a fundamental, scientific-based analysis about whether or not the land should be in the ALR and whether the land is suitable for agriculture.
- The ALC will not be interested in the future use of the property; that is a completely separate process.
- The ALC will focus on the agricultural capability and suitability. That is how the initial ALR boundaries were established.

PAAC comments:

- Residents may remember the recent issue with the cattle feed lot in Gordon Head and the revolt of the neighbours surrounding the farm. Animals can be noisy and smelly. Farm equipment is loud and creates dust.
- If there are small landholdings or community gardens, there will be lots of people coming on to the property, and security could be an issue for adjacent residents.
- The residents' concerns that they have no idea what is proposed for the land should it be developed are valid.

- Although portions of the land could be set aside for community gardens after some soil remediation, much of the site has been filled, is rocky and not viable for farming; it would be difficult to make any money from farming.
- While there is strong belief in preserving the ALR, sometimes you have to be practical.
- A PAAC member applied successfully to include her property in the ALR and remediated her soil from Class 4 to Class 1 and 2.
- Another member's family owned a chicken farm at the corner of Royal Oak/Cordova Bay/ Blenkinsop in the late 80s. The property was within the Sewer Enterprise Boundary and eventually they were surrounded by houses; not one complaint was ever received.
- The ALC faces a dilemma: new farmers cannot afford to buy land based on today's values, and from an economic standpoint, a farmer would not buy this land.
- However, if the ALR had not been put in place in 1973, BC could look like Los Angeles today.
- The subject property is 27 acres and 85% of it is within the ALR, it is also within the Urban Containment Boundary.
- It is a huge investment to remediate the land, but it could be done; Sandown is three times the size of this property and it will be remediated. Haliburton Farms, now 10 acres of thriving farmland, was remediated.
- There is increasing pressure on our lands due to population growth and the need for housing.
- The ALR was established because we only have so much food-producing lands and they needed to be protected for food security in the future.
- Food production has changed and evolved over the years; greenhouses have the highest food output per square foot.
- When the rules shifted in the 1980s to allow golf courses on ALR land, it was because the land could be brought back into production. In the past few years we have seen a few golf courses close – Prospect Lake, Royal Oak, Glen Meadows. With the recent changes to the ALC and the strengthening of the ALR by the provincial government, it is doubtful we will see a favourable look at golf courses because it would cause a domino effect.
- There has been much talk about the urban/rural mix with farmers and residential areas and this is common, especially on the Peninsula. Most farmers are good neighbours; a good example of this is Haliburton Farms which is surrounded by residents and has many incubating young farmers.
- The current Royal Oak LAP was passed 20 years ago, and a lot has changed.
- Saanich recently passed its first Agricultural Strategy and the stakeholders who provided input are 100% behind supporting food security and agriculture.
- The Saanich Strategic Plan indicates an increase in the amount of land to be set aside for food production – and this ALR exclusion application will fly in the face of that.
- People have worked hard to restore a farm on the corner of Holland and Blueridge; it is now a very productive farm generating \$80,000 a year on 1.5 acres.
- Agriculture is evolving and the ALR was established with that in mind.
- One member felt strongly that she does not support taking land out of the ALR and we should not recommend putting agriculture in further jeopardy.
- People want local food and it is becoming more profitable.
- As an agricultural commission we need to continue to support agriculture.

Based on the statements above, the Chair reiterated his earlier opinion that this is why PAAC should not make a recommendation, but just provide comments.

A resident of the area stated:

- She wanted to reassure PAAC that residents in the surrounding area support the property remaining in the ALR and are not doing so with their eyes closed.

- She grew up on a farm and some of the neighbours have been farmers. We are all aware of the issues that could crop up for neighbours immediately adjacent to an ALR property, such as the noise and the smell.
 - Considering this, we still support retention of the property within the ALR.
 - We are between a rock and a hard place: on one hand we could have a farm or farms of all different types, or we could have development, destroying the land with concrete.
 - We lived for years with the golf course, which had dust, noisy equipment and security issues with golfers walking onto private property to retrieve balls. A farm will have the same, perhaps a bit smellier.

Norman James, a contractor, stated:

- In Victoria we have a huge problem with fill. Construction sites are taking fill over the Malahat, but also areas like Metchosin are accepting fill and making it quite viable for farming. This particular site could be remediated as well.

The Chair thanked everyone for their comments noting all arguments have their place.

After the meeting, the following statement was submitted by a PAAC member, circulated to other PAAC members and no objections were received to including the following as part of the record of the meeting:

“Thank you all for a very thoughtful discussion last night regarding the Marsett application. I wanted to ask if I might add something to our notes to the District. I wondered if we may suggest that there may be a way forward on the application that may be more of a win win for all of the important interests at the table to support agriculture, respect the ALR and assist the landowner.

Not all of the land under consideration is in the ALR. If there could be an arrangement made that looks at taking forward a proposal that would see the portion of the land in the ALR preserved, that would sit much better given the interests at hand. The Sandown example is a creative solution that was undertaken by Platform Properties with the District of North Saanich and Dr. Elliot (the PA for that project). It may be that a design for development could be looked at that would see a portion of the land set aside for agriculture (and potentially in this case due to the proximity to neighbouring residents – something like Haliburton small farm incubator and community gardening – as it would have relatively little impact comparatively to other types of operations, would allow for the remediation required and there is a high interest and need in the area for this type of land access). The opportunity of the emerging Foodlands Trust may provide an avenue for this type of arrangement.

CORRESPONDENCE:

- a) PAAC letter to CRD Water re farm water rates (attached with agenda package)
- b) PAAC letter to CRD Board re Foodlands Trust (attached with agenda package)

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – NEW

Proposed Horse Drawn Carriage Ban

Letter from Mayor Windsor, District of Central Saanich, dated May 22, 2019, regarding Victoria's Council's proposed ban of horse drawn carriages in downtown Victoria, noting that Central Saanich is very concerned about the detrimental impacts of such a decision on agricultural-based businesses in

the community. Two local businesses include Tally-Ho Carriage Tours and Victoria Carriage Tours and a ban would mean both companies would be put out of business, affecting their employees and other agricultural businesses in Central Saanich. Central Saanich Council proposes to discuss the issue at an upcoming Council meeting.

Discussion ensued and the following points were noted:

- Work horses and the carriage trade are important to farming.
- If we don't speak up about this, the carriages could be banned which would lead to a reduction in breeding of horses until the numbers are reduced so much that they will no longer be genetically viable.
- We need manure to grow crops; our soils are already depleted.
- Another concern is the harnesses are not the best and sometimes the horses are not properly trained.
- Agreed that horses play an important role but we need to ensure there are good regulations and good practices in how the horses and their equipment is maintained.

MOTION: Moved by Bev Marley and Seconded by Carol Davidson: "That PAAC supports the continuation of the horse carriage trade provided that inspections ensure the health and safety of the animals is not compromised."

CARRIED

SAANICH FAIR 2019 PLANNING

The theme for this year is "Bee Happy". This will tie in with the IPI group, who were part of PAAC's booth for the last year. Linda Geggie advised they would like to be part of the booth this year also.

Isobel to send an email to see who is available to assist with the setup and staffing of the booth.

NOTE: It was later agreed to cancel PAAC's participation in the Saanich Fair this year as too many of the regular volunteers were unavailable.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – CURRENT

- a) **Goose/Deer Management Strategy (Bev Marley & Jeff Weightman)** nothing to report
- b) **CRD Food & Agriculture Strategy (Linda Geggie & Jeff Weightman)**
Linda stated the Task Force will be reconstituted. Previous members from PAAC included Terry Michell and Bob Maxwell. Areas who have indicated support for the Foodlands Trust: Highlands, Saanich, North Saanich, Central Saanich, Sidney, Sooke, View Royal, and Victoria. Municipalities who do not support the Foodlands Trust are Colwood, Langford, Esquimalt and Oak Bay. Metchosin has deferred its decision.
- c) **Saanich Agriculture and Food Security Plan – Cam Scott, not present.**
- d) **Island Pollinator Initiative (IPI) (Bob Maxwell) – not present**

e) Sandown Update

Councillor Smythe stated an agrologist has been on site recently. There will be a presentation to Council on Monday from one group who is interested in managing the property. Two groups wanting to farm the area, the Sandown Transition Team and Hamish Crawford, owner of the Roost and Highland House Farm. It was questioned when the report from the previous agrologist, Hally Hofmeyr, will be available.

AGRICULTURAL STRATEGY – SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS

- a) **Water** (Michael Doehnel)
- b) **Farm Economics** (Terry Michell) – not present
- c) **Agricultural Land Base** (Phil Christie)
- d) **Education and Outreach** (Linda Geggie)

UPCOMING EVENTS:

2019 FARM TOUR

A draft of the Farm Tour Brochure was distributed. Everything is in hand, tour times booked with farms and the winery; lunch arranged at Bev's; bus booked. Numbers are down slightly to what was expected, but it is busy time of year with school wrapping up; many councillors were unable to attend due to other commitments, others are able to attend for a half day.

Adjournment: On a Motion from Linda Geggie the meeting adjourned at 9:18 pm

Next Meeting: The next PAAC meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, September 12, 2019** at **7:00 PM**, Saanich Municipal Hall in Committee Room No. 2.

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