



**MINUTES OF THE
PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
Committee Room 2, Saanich Municipal Hall
Thursday, FEBRUARY 13, 2020 AT 7:30 PM**

Present: Linda Geggie in the Chair; Larry Kimmett, Bev Marley; Larry Sluggett; Dianne Williamson; Councillors Thompson (C.Saanich), Smyth (N.Saanich) and Taylor (Saanich); Robin Tunnicliffe (Metchosin). Also present was Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Clerk.

Guests: Doug Pepper, Regional Agrologist; Jeff Weightman, CRD; Tilar Miles and Christine Sayegh.

Regrets: Phil Christie, Satnam Dheenshaw, Terry Michell, Carol Davison

Minutes: The Minutes of January 10, 2020 were adopted.

Introductions were made for the benefit of new Saanich Council representative Ned Taylor and our guests.

It was noted that the Election of Officers will be held in March when our current Chair, Phil Christie, is present and new members have been appointed.

TREASURER'S REPORT – Carol Davidson – not present. The Secretary reported there was no change to the accounts.

SPEAKER'S BUREAU:

Larry Kimmett had planned to show a short video on ways to reduce nitrogen and phosphorus levels, which ties into the recent presentations about high phosphorus levels in Elk and Beaver lakes. Unfortunately the projector would not function. The secretary to arrange for a demonstration on the use of the equipment. **Larry will present at the March meeting.**

CARRY

Chris Wiczorek, Assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, had planned to provide an update on Ministry initiatives, but unfortunately he is no longer with the Minister's office. Sam Godfrey will be attending future meetings and will provide the update in March.

CARRY

SAANICH FAIR PROPOSAL – BOB THOMPSON

Bob Thompson, speaking as a representative of the Saanich Fair and not a Councillor:

- He proposed a plan to use the display space that PAAC normally occupies, with a larger 10' x 20' tent and partnerships with other agricultural organizations.
- Potential partners could include Saanich Fair (Buy BC), CR-Fair, Peninsula Country Market, South Vancouver DFMA, and perhaps 4-H or Destination Greater Victoria.
- Not only would this make for a varied and more interesting display in a larger space, it would provide access to volunteers and PAAC wouldn't need their own tent.
- Buy BC has a great map of the Peninsula that marks all the farms.
- We could also access the Agricultural Education Trailer. This could be a place to show videos and also to securely store display items overnight.

- The theme for the fair this year is The Camera.
- He will have more information next month on the proposal.

PAAC members were very receptive to the idea, noting that it is a lot of work to set up and take down, as well as find volunteers. Last year we were unable to participate as the key players were unavailable.

CORRESPONDENCE:

- a) Letter from Central Saanich dated January 23, 2020 on Carbon Sequestration Agriculture Practices, referring a Motion from the January 20, 2020 Council meeting to PAAC for comment.
- Discussion noted that it would be helpful to have a workshop on carbon sequestration to better understand the concept, or have someone come to speak to us about the issue..
 - The issue is linked with climate change initiatives and food security - and an important concept for agriculture.
 - Tilar Miles of Percell Farms stated they use carbon sequestration practices and invited members to come out to the farm. She noted as farmers it is their primary focus.
 - It was agreed before responding that we need to find out more about the process.
 - Jeff Weightman had information that he will forward to the secretary.

Secretary to advise Central Saanich accordingly

Linda Geggie noted that she was asked by a local farmer what PAAC's thoughts were on the proposal to move bio solids to Hartland landfill site. Discussion noted:

- There were thoughts a few years ago about using bio solids on farmland, but the CFIA is against this because of the many contaminants, including pharmaceuticals.
- A concern is if they are moved to Hartland, particulate matter will fall or leach on to the farmlands, impacting the quality of the produce and the soils.
- Suggested there is a need to better understand the processing of biosolids.
- Jeff Weightman stated the CRD Board approved the shipment of pallets to the landfill.
- Suggested that someone from the CRD be invited to PAAC to speak on the issue. Jeff will follow up.

Carry to a future meeting

- b) Letter from PAAC to Central Saanich re dissolution of the Agricultural Advisory Committee. This issue has resulted in much discussion in the media and by email. The Chair had asked that any further discussion on the matter be delayed until the March meeting when he is present.

Councillor Thompson noted that the municipality is shifting to “select committees”, which are more like a task force established for a particular purpose – eg: the OCP review. He noted the municipality has not abandoned agriculture.

CARRY to March for further discussion

- c) Letter to Minister of Agriculture from PAAC requesting an additional agrologist for the Island. No response or acknowledgment has been received to date. Secretary to follow up.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – CURRENT

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

Jeff stated:

- Last year's bird count missed Victoria and the Gorge areas because it is part of the international air space. Different methods of counting are used for this area (counts estimated between 1,500 and 2,000). 4,000 birds were counted in other areas of the CRD.
- The CRD has supported an application for addling egg for the entire region; we will focus on the core areas – including the Gorge, Oak Bay and Royal Roads.
- He is still seeking additional support to determine the management options for the remainder of the year.
- Deer Hunting continues on the Peninsula which is keeping the population down.
- He asked farmers to let him know if they are experiencing a problem with deer in their area.
- Oak Bay, Saanich and Esquimalt are still trying to figure out how to address the deer populations.
- He advised everyone to let the CRD or the Councils know if there are continued problems and conflicts.

b) CRD Food & Agriculture Strategy (Linda Geggie & Jeff Weightman)

- The Terms of Reference were recently reviewed for the Task Force and a couple of meetings have been held to prioritize items. Another meeting is scheduled in a few weeks.
- Re Foodlands Trust, Saanich recently decided to support the programme by offering Panama Flats. The CRD will start a feasibility study, looking at specific parcels of land to determine what makes sense to use for growing and what upgrades will be required. An agrologist will also need to assess the land.
- The Kwantlen Polytechnic University Food Systems Division may be a partner and will help explore the scope of the work required, along with input from the Task Force.

c) Saanich Agriculture and Food Security Plan – No representative present

Councillor Taylor stated that as indicated above in item(b), Saanich has supported the Foodlands Trust in principle and provided Panama Flats as agricultural property to support the Trust.

d) Island Pollinator Initiative (IPI) – no updates at this time.

e) Sandown Update

Councillor Smyth stated:

- The Request for Proposals will close in two weeks. To date, responses have been received from Gobind Farms and Sandown Centre for Regenerating Agriculture.
- Staff have a full vetting process and will review each application prior to providing recommendations to Council. He anticipates it will be at least another 6 weeks before decisions are made.
- It is a possibility that the property could be shared between applicants rather than one operator, as well as leasing smaller plots.
- The Sandown property has lots of water and lots of geese.

f) Farm Worker Housing – Update

- Councillor Thompson stated he met with Ryan Vantreight last week; the FWH application is still not settled for Longview Farms.
- Ryan has received conditional approval from the ALC in response to the December 2018 application for accommodation for 45 workers on Longview Farms. The ALC has advised he has to relocate the units from the proposed location to the south boundary of the property, which is adjacent to residential areas. He also has to remove the kitchen/dining/laundry component from the application. Discussions on going.
- It was suggested that Ryan be invited to attend a future meeting to provide an update.

AGRICULTURAL STRATEGY – SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS

a) Water (Michael Doehnel) – not present

b) Farm Economics (Terry Michell) – not present

- Robin Tunnicliffe the prices she charges at the Metchosin market and farmgate sales for her organic produce have changed very little over the past 20 years, and yet costs for seed, supplies, labour and other costs continue to rise, even doubled in some cases.
- There is a greater demand for farm fresh and organic products, but the price ceiling is still there.
- She has to pay her staff a living wage and she also tries to sell more value-added products.
- Her winter market sales are increasing, although the quality of the winter produce is lower, so prices need to be set accordingly.
- She is concerned about raising her prices but acknowledged that farmers have to be bold in order to make a living; if people cannot afford to buy good food perhaps the government needs to step in and help in some way. Locally produced food costs more than imported foods; this does not make sense.
- She has a “seconds” fridge on her farm where people can buy produce that is not quite perfect at a lower price. This always sells quickly.

Lengthy discussion ensued:

- We normally hear input on farm economics from Terry Mitchell, who operates a large commercial/industrial operation. Good to hear the other end of the spectrum - Robin is a small-scale organic farmer.
- Organic prices were set higher to begin with, but now all operating costs have gone up and it is difficult to keep raising the prices of organic locally grown produce.
- This is something we need to be aware of, chart what products have sold for in the past and make a case for higher pricing based on actual costs. IOPA has a list of suggested grower prices.
- For example, the costs for sawdust have tripled, chicken feed has increased from \$107/** to \$590 and labour costs have gone way up since Firbank Farms started its poultry operation 60+ years ago. Yet the price the farm receives for its eggs and chickens is lower comparatively. However it is the Egg Marketing Board that sets the prices here, not the farmer.
- Perhaps a way to keep the prices down is to help the farmers and make farming more affordable.
- Farmers tend not to make money from growing crops: the entire profit margin will be in value-added goods.
- Tilar Miles stated, as a local winery owner and in terms of food security and carbon footprint on the Island, they try to use locally grown fruit for their wine. However, it is difficult to make the economics per litre of wine vs the tonnage of fruit required work and make sense. Therefore, she is being forced to buy fruit from the Okanagan to make the the required yields.

- We all see that produce prices are increasing. Larry Kimmett met with a Sobey's representative last week who wanted to know how much local farmers could produce and provide on a regular basis. Sobey's told him the cost for organic peppers could be as high as \$7.99/lb.
- Noted this would be an excellent display topic for the Saanich Fair this year – to let the general public know what costs farmers are facing and what the actual cost of growing, say an organic pepper, would be.
- Consumers often tend to buy the cheaper product simply because they cannot afford the higher priced, locally grown organic product, especially if they have a family to support.

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

d) Education and Outreach (Linda Geggie)

- As mentioned above, for the Saanich Fair this year we could focus on educating the consumer on the true cost of locally grown food.
- The Islands Agricultural Show had a display geared towards kids, asking what could you buy for \$50. Perhaps something like that would be good learning tool at the fair.
- Robin Tunnicliffe and Doug Pepper also attended the Ag Show.
- Doug noted that the seminars were well attended and different from last year. There were many children there this year.
- Three different workshops were offered on cannabis – it was a hot topic.

Land Leasing Programme:

- Larry Sluggett noted that he and Terry Michell met recently with two representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture and discussed a new entrants programme for land leasing and farm succession. He suggested to the representatives it would be helpful to make a presentation to PAAC. Doug Pepper offered to provide an update on this issue to the March or April meeting, or he will ask one of the representatives to attend.

April Meeting date:

- The April meeting falls on the eve of the Easter Long Weekend and the Municipal Hall will close at 6:00 p.m. The secretary suggested the PAAC meeting be rescheduled to the following week, **April 16th**. Members supported this change.

Adjournment: On a Motion from Linda Geggie the meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm

Next Meeting: The next PAAC meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, March 12, 2020.**

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