

**SPECIAL MEETING
PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION MEETING
HELD BY ZOOM
THURSDAY, January 14, 2021, 7:00 PM**

In attendance: Phil Christie, Chair; Linda Geggie; Bev Marley; Terry Michell; Larry Sluggett; Robin Tunnicliffe (Metchosin); Dianne Williamson; Councillors Thompson (Central Saanich) and Brett Smyth (North Saanich), Pierre Iachetti, Saanich Planner and Isobel Hoffmann, recording secretary.

Guests: Emily Carmichael, Ministry of Agriculture; Jeff Weightman, CRD; Bob Maxwell; Michael Doehnel

Regrets: Carol Davidson; Larry Kimmett; Satnam Dheenshaw, Councillor Chambers, (Saanich)

Minutes: The Minutes of December 10 were adopted with some minor amendments: Page 6 regarding the ALR, to clarify that the land freeze was introduced in 1972, but the actual ALR was not officially established until 1973. Page 7 to confirm that names of the body in charge of the Sandown Operating Agreement is Circular Farm Group.

Treasurer's Report (Carol Davidson) – not present

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: NEW

CARBON SEQUESTRATION – ADDING ORGANIC MATTER TO OUR SOILS - Bob Maxwell

Bob Maxwell has suggested that regional farmers would be interested in carbon sequestration, and questioned whether we have the funds or the desire to initiate an on-farm programme to help farmers understand this method and the importance of adding organic matter to our soils.

Further to his emails dated December 29, 2020 and January 12, 2021, Bob Maxwell stated:

- In looking at what other countries and jurisdictions are doing, our farmers seem to be doing very well with this initiative. He doesn't know how many farmers would have the appetite to do more on their farms unless there is funding available.
- We would need to inventory and review the status of the farms with respect to carbon sequestration.
- In his email, he asked the following questions:

- 1) **Does PAAC think regional farmers would be interested, do they have the equipment, funds and desire to have an on-farm program? Do they know about soil carbon and climate?**
- 2) **Are our farmed/agricultural soils really OK for carbon management?**
- 3) **Is there a government or agency program and possibly funds that PAAC and farmers can tap into?**

WEB site that can shed light on farm and ranch carbon programs:

<https://aitc-canada.ca/en-ca/learn-about-agriculture/category/growing-crops/carbon-sequestration>

A plan of California for Ranch and Farm

<http://www.carboncycle.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/carbon-farm-planning-step-by-step.pdf>

The Chair stated:

- There is a shortage of organic material on our farms, and the material is difficult to obtain, especially at a fair price. There are many ways we can better manage our organic material. He thought this was a good agenda item for the coming year to see if there is an agency that could help farmers with education and/or funding.

Discussion noted:

- CRD has a website “**Rethink Waste**” re the Hartland Site and the Waste Management Plan. The Plan includes strategic actions for managing waste, recycling, composting and garbage at the landfill site.
- Suggested PAAC could write to the Board re a better use of the composted materials.
- Farmers need help to modernize their farming systems for sustainable farming.
- Suggested having a speaker to bring us up-to-date on sustainable farming.
- Over the past 15 years there has been an increase in cover crops and hay farming, but we have yet to do anything significant about climate change – such as capturing our excess water instead of draining it, and to stop cutting down so many trees.
- Farmers need assistance to analyze today's farm practices.

Councillor Thompson stated both Central and North Saanich are doing OCP reviews and perhaps this is opportune time to include this topic in the OCP with respect to agriculture.

Linda Geggie stated:

- Normally each year we hold the Island Agriculture Show and the F2F workshops. Carbon sequestration is a topic that could be carried forward to be discussed at these venues when we are permitted to hold them.
- Re F2F, we are looking at alternate ways of learning – such as on-farm tours with speakers, ZOOM talks and webinars.
- PAAC does have an education sub-committee and perhaps using methods such as zoom talks and webinars we could learn more about carbon sequestration.

Bev Marley asked if there was a way to bring an expert onto farms to carry out an assessment, to point out ways we could improve farm operations. Some of the issues she has noticed are lack of hedgerows, lack of trees, management of live-stock.

Emily Carmichael stated:

- Island Agriculture Show is not happening this year, but the Pacific Agriculture Show is being held on-line January 28 to 30, <http://www.agricultureshow.net>. There are other webinars available for a small fee.

Note, after the meeting, Emily passed along the following information:

- In terms of the discussion re soil, there are available recordings from the ACARN online conference from this past December: (They can be found under the Tuesday, Dec 8 am tab: <https://www.bcacarn.com/2020-virtual-workshop/>)
 - **How land use, land cover and soil organic carbon are changing in the Fraser Valley**
Sean Smuggler, University of British Columbia
And
 - **Peri-urban regions and their nutrient sink dilemma; Lower Fraser Valley case study**
Shabbily Pittman, Agriculture and Agra-Food Canada and David Poona, BC Ministry of Agriculture
- As a part of the ministry's agriservice webinars, there is also an upcoming webinar on manure spreading on Feb. 10. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriservice-bc/webinars>
- Regarding agriculture climate adaptation network, she knows of a speaker from UBC who can speak to soil management; she will forward contact information.

Discussion also noted that National Farmers Credit Union has been doing research into carbon sequestration: see www.nfu.ca

ACTION:

1. Write letter to all municipalities suggesting they consider including carbon sequestration in its OCPs.
2. Assign PAAC member to search for an appropriate speaker re soils and carbon sequestration and also statistics re carbon sequestration.

**804/812/820 McKenzie & 4007 Rainbow Road (Saanich Referral)
– ALR Exclusion**

Note this application was referred to PAAC for the December meeting. Members felt that more information was required before rendering an opinion. The additional information has not been received to date and unfortunately Pierre Lachiette, the Saanich Planning representative attending tonight's meeting, was unfamiliar with this application.

The Chair stated It is difficult to make informed and meaningful comments without input and/or additional information from Saanich.

ACTION:

Request a presentation from Saanich Planning at the next meeting so that we can gain a better understanding of the issues.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: CURRENT

Central Saanich OCP Review:

- A copy of the initial draft OCP review is posted on the Central Saanich Website.
- Bob Thompson stated that the process has just begun and will take many months.
- He is Chair of the Advisory OCP Committee which includes members of the public.
- Agriculture is vital to the community and it will be the focus of the April 28 meeting.
- If PAAC has any recommendations or suggestions – such as carbon sequestration discussed earlier in the meeting – pass them along.
- The current OCP is available on line; he will forward the section pertaining to agriculture to the secretary to send to PAAC members.

Proposed Grape & Fruit Atlas for Vancouver Island – Phil Christie (Chair)

Letter dated December 14, 2020 sent to Adrian Arts, Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Fisheries; Kate Dursiek, BC Wine & Grape Council; Tyrion Miskell, BC Grape Growers Assoc; Dean Canadzich, Wine Island Growers Assoc; Jason Childs, BC Farm Crafted & Cider Assoc., outlining concept for a Grape and Fruit Atlas for Vancouver Island, as discussed at the last meeting.

- A few acknowledgements received. No actual comments to date, but noted the information would have been received just before Christmas and this is only 2 weeks into the New Year.
- Questions for PAAC to consider:
 1. Should PAAC contribute funding from the donation received a few years ago from the Fruit Growers Association? And
 2. Should PAAC forgo the regular annual \$2,000 grant from sponsoring municipalities for on-going operations in view of COVID-19 in 2020 or redirect these funds to the Grape and Fruit Atlas?
- Discussion noted that lots of work has been done already on soils and climate, which needs to be gathered together.
- Questioned how much more work it would be to add vegetables to the mix, as well as the grapes, tree fruits and berries.
- Agreed having an analysis on the suitability of crops in certain areas would be valuable.

CARRY to next meeting for further discussion.

50th Anniversary of the establishment of the Agricultural Land Reserve (1972) (discussed at November 12 meeting)

- Larry Kimmett sent email noted that the ALR was legislated in 1973, not 1972. While this is correct, the land freeze was initiated in 1972.
- Emily Carmichael confirmed she has been in touch with someone from the ALC and it is on their radar to have a celebration. They are open to suggestions, which can be passed on to the ALC through her.

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- Bob Maxwell suggested bumper stickers would be a good promotion.
- The Chair agreed and asked the Commission think about other suggestions and bring comments to the next meeting.

CARRY FORWARD

FARM WORKER ACCOMMODATIONS – SAANICH

Pierre Iachetti, Saanich Planner, stated Saanich has been working on ways to provide farm worker accommodations, and he noted this has been a topic for PAAC for a long time.

- He stated there is a draft document, which has not been reviewed by the Director of Planning or Saanich Council yet.
- PAAC will be one of the first groups to be asked to comment on the document.
- Generally, Farm Worker Accommodations will be allowed in agricultural zones with Class 9 farm status as defined under the BC Assessment Authority.
- Applications will be deferred to the ALC when it is on ALR land. He noted that ALC policies and regulations have changed.
- He is recommending Temporary Use Permits, similar to Central Saanich, with a broad list of zones.
- Council will make the final decision.
- In response to question from PAAC about reaching out to other jurisdictions who have farm accommodations, he stated he has spoken with Ivo van der Kemp at Central Saanich. He acknowledged that Kelowna, Abbotsford and Chilliwack have established accommodations, but he has not spoken to them yet.

PAAC discussion noted:

- It seems that regulatory requirements have become heavier each year and COVID has made a bad situation worse.
- It was difficult to get farm workers in 2020 because of CERB payments and also cumbersome to get foreign workers into the country with the required quarantine.
- The farm community needs worker accommodations, but between government requirements and health regulations it has been difficult.
- On the Mainland, permission can be granted by the ALC but then the farmer runs into a roadblock with the local municipality. Farmers are very frustrated.

COMMENTS & UPDATES ON FARMING OPERATIONS SINCE MARCH, 2020

Larry Sluggett stated:

- Thrifty Foods suppliers have been relocated from Victoria and now we have to deal with people in Montreal or Toronto. Years ago there was a complex on Keating X Road and now they have moved to Langford.
- This might be fiscally responsible for business but it is difficult for farmers when it comes to selling large quantities.

FARM INSURANCE

Dianne Williamson stated:

- Her farm insurance policy expired in January. She discovered that many underwriters are not handling live-stock any more.
- It is a similar situation in the Okanagan and Abbotsford. There was article in Country Life last month about insurance coverage.
- This is a huge liability for her business during the pandemic, or if there is a fire for example.
- Her Vancouver based insurance company was the same for over 40 years, and she has had no claims. She received a letter from them saying they could not continue coverage because the liability was too high.
- She eventually found insurance coverage but it was 50% higher. This could put some poultry and dairy farms out of business.
- Terry Michell noted that a landowner who leases to another farmer had his insurance costs rise from \$1400 to \$6500. The insurance on his own farm increased by \$6000.

Discussion ensued, noting PAAC write a letter to the provincial and federal Ministers of Agriculture outlining the concerns about increasing insurance costs in the agriculture sector. Draft letter to be circulated to members. Important to have precise & accurate details.

OTHER BUSINESS

UPDATE ON GEESE AND DEER INITIATIVES – CRD – JEFF WEIGHTMAN

Jeff Weightman stated:

- He anticipates a CRD report on the deer initiative by next week which will be heard by the Planning and Protective Services Committee, with the intent being to decide whether the CRD should create a service for deer.
- At this time there is no report on the geese, but it will be coming.

Note the following update was received from Jeff after the meeting:

In follow up to the discussion at the last meeting, the CRD Planning Committee discussed a deer management service at the CRD and decided to recommend to the CRD Board that no further action be taken. The discussion can be found here: <https://www.crd.bc.ca/about/board-committees/live-webcast>

The issue will be brought to the next board meeting on **February 10th** at 1 pm.

LANGFORD ALR EXCLUSIONS

A council representative stated that it had been brought to her attention that there had been many ALR exclusions in Langford which resulted in a pot of money to be set aside for agriculture, but to the person's knowledge, this money has not been made available. She stated she does not know specifics but could try to find out.

- Linda Geggie stated that Matthew Baldwin, who spoke at the Food and Security Round Table, was aware of this. There was a concern about the lack of an organization to support food security in Langford, but when such an organization was formed they were told the funds had gone into general revenue.
- It is not known if there has been a council-led initiative to reverse their decision.
- Some members thought it was something PAAC should follow up on and make enquiries at the ALC, but others mentioned that Langford is not a PAAC member and this issue is way beyond PAAC's purview. It is also something the CRD cannot get involved in unless it is empowered to do so by a municipality.
- It was suggested an individual could look into the matter on their own merit.
- Linda suggested it is perhaps something CR-Fair could research as we have no definitive information on the issue.

CARRY for further discussion

2020 PAAC ANNUAL REPORT

PAAC sub-committee Chairs were asked to submit their respective reports for last year by the end of February at the latest.

MEMBERSHIP 2021

Two applications received last year to fill two vacancies on PAAC. Due to COVID-19, new appointments were not made. One of the applicants is still available to join PAAC but the second is unable to do so at this time due to family issues. However, Robin Tunnicliffe, who currently is Metchosin Council's representative, would like to join PAAC as a voting member. All members present were in agreement.

ACTION:

1. The secretary contact Metchosin regarding Robin becoming a voting member and ask whether they wish to appoint another Council representative. Robin has indicated she would be able to fulfill both roles.
2. After issue (1) has been decided, the secretary to prepare letters to the sponsoring municipalities for Commission appointments for 2021.

Next Meeting: **Thursday, FEBRUARY 11, 2021, 7:00 pm by ZOOM**

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 8:20 pm