

**SPECIAL MEETING
PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION MEETING
HELD BY ZOOM
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2021, 7:00 PM**

In attendance: Phil Christie, Chair; Bev Marley; Carol Davidson (Treasurer) Terry Michell; Larry Sluggett; RobinTunnickliffe (Metchosin); Dianne Williamson; Councillors Graham (Central Saanich) and Brett Smyth (North Saanich),Pierre Iachetti, Saanich Planner and Isobel Hoffmann, recording secretary.

Guests: Emily Carmichael, Ministry of Agriculture; Ali Rivers, Central Saanich Planning; Adriane Pollard, Environmental Services, Saanich;

Regrets: Linda Geggie, Larry Kimmett; Satnam Dheenshaw, Councillor Chambers, (Saanich)

Minutes: The Minutes of January 14 were adopted as circulated.

Treasurer's Report (Carol Davidson) – Balance in chequing account is \$1,586.07; term deposit \$20,691.30, which expires February 19, 2022.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: NEW

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

The Saanich Planner was unable to attend tonight's meeting but has indicated she will attend in March. The Chair noted PAAC would like to know about the general lay of the land and some context to help PAAC provide an informed opinion.

CARRY FWD to March Meeting

**PRESENTATION: RESILIENT SAANICH – ADRIANE POLLARD, MANAGER,
SAANICH ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES**

Ms. Pollard displayed the information on screen and stated:

- Council adopted the Terms of Reference for the Resilient Saanich Technical Committee, which will be active for the next two years.
- The Plan is to create an environmental policy framework and a biodiversity conservation strategy.
- The Resilient Saanich Technical Committee (RSTC) will advise Council on all aspects of the project, starting with draft goals and objectives for the entire project.
- There are 3 key areas:
 - Biodiversity Conservation Strategy
 - Climate Plan (recently adopted)
 - Enhanced Stewardship Opportunities
- Ten experts have been appointed to the RSTC, as well as a council liaison, and administration support staff.

- The first “action item” will be to propose the project goals and objectives through public engagement, including Stakeholders such as PAAC, analyze the results and present to Council in March/April. Council will then decide on the final guidelines and objectives.
- **Vision from the current Official Community Plan:** *“Saanich is a model steward working diligently to improve and balance the natural and built environments. Saanich restores and protects air, land, and water quality, the biodiversity of existing natural areas and eco-systems, the network of natural areas and open spaces, and urban forests.”*
- **Proposed vision of The Resilient Saanich Technical Committee:** *“By 2030, coordinated efforts by all in Saanich/WSÁNEĆ yield measurable improvements in climate change resilience, habitat conservation, watershed health and ecological footprint, benefiting all those who share and inhabit our community.”*
- **Proposed Principles:**
 1. Recognize the intrinsic value of nature
 2. Respect Indigenous knowledge and land uses
 3. Consider future generations
 4. Ensure evidence-based* decision making
 5. Adopt the precautionary principle when facing knowledge gaps
 6. Build upon foundational knowledge of historical land use
 7. Lead by example through innovation and best practices
 8. Look beyond our borders to achieve results at a bioregional scale
 9. Address climate adaptation and mitigation in all that we do
 10. Work in partnership with diverse interests to achieve outcomes that realize multiple values and benefits
- **Proposed goals:**
 1. Protect, restore and enhance the ecological function and biological diversity of Saanich.
 2. Develop and implement complimentary and coordinated policies, strategies, Aregulations, and incentives grounded in the overarching set of guiding principles to achieve the vision.
- **Proposed objectives**
 1. Fairly and effectively manage the natural and built environment to adapt to climate change, and enhance biodiversity and other essential ecosystem services.
 2. Foster resistance and regenerative capacity (i.e., resilience) in our landscapes against escalating environmental shock and stressors.
 3. Engage and support citizens in diverse approaches to active and beneficial stewardship.
 4. Update bylaws and policies across all departments to be transparent and consistent with the Environmental Policy Framework
- In terms of agriculture and its contribution to biodiversity, she has seen good examples on the Peninsula where streams have been restored and helped to provide habitats for birds and pollinators, who in turn have helped with natural pest control and shade trees have helped to keep livestock cool.

- We need to recognize farm contributions to biodiversity.
- The next steps will be to complete the engagement process, holding virtual open houses and on-line surveys.
- PAAC can make comments as a group, or as individuals using the feedback form on line, or send emails to biodiversity@sasanch.ca
- She urged the Commission to provide feedback and she will ensure a copy of the draft guidelines is sent in a reduced format to Isobel for distribution to members.

The Chair stated he would prefer comments come from PAAC rather than as individuals. It was suggested we could add this as a topic on our agenda while the RSTC is on-going. Ms. Pollard reminded the Commission that the timeline is short, with the first draft guidelines proposed to go to Council in March/April.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: CURRENT

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

A letter requesting input from various groups was sent mid-December. Two acknowledgements have been received but no comments. Suggested a reminder be sent.

Previously noted that an Atlas was prepared in the 1980s for the Okanagan which has proven helpful to farmers. Also in the 2000s, Central Saanich produced a document which in part recognized that strawberries grew particularly well in Peninsula soils, and some soil mapping was included. Bob Maxwell helped to put this together.

Emily Carmichael, Ministry of Agriculture, advised she was talking to Rob Kline recently about this matter. She has a few pages from the Central Saanich document and noted it would be helpful to get the entire document.

The Chair pointed out that much of the information we need has already been researched. It just has to be organized and edited, and the scope of the project defined. He is not proposing that PAAC take on this project, but we could make a financial contribution using funds we received from the Fruit Growers Association a few years ago; this would be a good fit.

CARRY – reminder letters to be sent

50th Anniversary - establishment of the Agricultural Land Reserve (1972)

The land freeze was introduced in 1972, and the ALR was established in 1973. Unclear whether the celebration would be held in 2022 or 2023.

Emily Carmichael has been in contact with the ALC, who indicated they are planning some sort of celebration but at this time are looking for input and ideas on what this would look like.

Discussion ensued:

- Surprised ALC has not heard from some of the larger agricultural groups throughout BC.
- The establishment of the ALR was precedent-setting across North America; areas without this protection are a mess.
- Suggested Emily could touch base with Kim Grout at the ALC.
- Also the current NDP government has a 4-year mandate and it was the NDP that introduced the ALR; it would be surprising if they did nothing to celebrate the anniversary.
- When recognizing the ALR, it would be a good opportunity to bring attention to its complexities. For example, the next generation of farmers will have a difficult time accessing affordable farmland. This could be the time to ask why it seems to be more viable to store RV's on the land rather than farm it.
- Many farmers are looking for land on the Peninsula and much of the good farmland is idle.
- There is not as much farming in Metchosin as there should be given the amount of land.
- Something needs to be done about making good use of these idle ALR lands.
- Some large growers on the mainland pay between \$100,000 and \$140,000 per acre for farmland. They can't get enough land, so are looking to areas around Kamloops and trucking from there to the lower mainland. Here we have land close by, still very expensive, even to rent. It is hard to build the necessary infrastructure when on a 5-year lease.
- Agreed there needs to be more support for young farmers.

Suggestions for the Celebration:

- Councillor Smyth suggested having a “Dave Barrett Award” to farmers across BC who exemplify the spirit of the ALR.
- Carol Davidson mentioned a programme in Ontario to celebrate farms who demonstrated sustainable farming through multiple generations by distributing metal signs with a large “C” to indicate 'Century Farms'. *Noted similar signage is displayed in the Cowichan Valley.*
- Bob Maxwell had previously mentioned having bumper stickers to promote the anniversary.
- What has been accomplished over the past 50 years needs be celebrated, and we should look forward to the next 50. Turn the challenges into suggestions – and this will require an investment of time and money. Perhaps highlight the main themes that would carry the ALR through the next 50 years.

Discussion ensued:

- Agreed we should keep the message positive, however it was noted that some ALR properties are being farmed at a low level, perhaps just enough to qualify for the farm tax rate.
- This creates problems and raises the question of whether the tax rate is too low. Perhaps a sliding scale should be used: for example, farmers have to exceed a certain level of production for the size of their property, or they would have to sell or lease, thereby allowing young or new farmers access.
- Farms would have to be evaluated on individual basis: one member has a 3.5 acre farm but two thirds of the property is heavily treed, and if she was required to produce more, she would have to cut down the trees.
- People who buy large tracts of farmland but don't necessarily farm intensively are still stewards of the land.

Central Saanich OCP Review: Ali Rivers

- The Advisory Committee working on the OCP will focus on the agricultural component when they meet in April.
- The schedule for the entire review is posted on-line; meetings will also be held around climate change and the environment. Minutes from these meetings will also be posted on-line.
- Council recently approved its priorities for 2021/22 OCP review, and this includes the environment and issues such as carbon sequestration.
- It is fortunate that the neighbouring municipalities of North Saanich and Sidney are undergoing their OCP reviews at the same time as this will provide continuity.

Farm Worker Accommodations – Saanich – Pierre Iachetti

- The report on Farm Worker Accommodations (FWA) has not yet gone to Council.
- In 2017, Council passed a Motion from the Agriculture and Food Security Tax Force to look into FWA. Phase 1 was completed in 2019, which was to hire a Planner to oversee the project.
- Based on community engagement and speaking with PAAC and other stakeholders, the need for FWA has been identified.
- Through internal discussions, it is recommended temporary farmworker housing be permitted within A-1 and A-4 zones that meet farm status under the BCAA guidelines.
- Mapping has been completed on a lot of properties that would benefit from FWA outside of the ALR.
- Central Saanich uses Temporary Use Permits on a case by case basis for FWA and it is likely that Saanich will follow the same example: issue a permit for 3 years, then if all is well, another 3 year permit, after which a more permanent solution would be examined if appropriate.
- Saanich will defer to the federal and provincial governments for guidance.

Pierre posed a number of questions to PAAC and the following comments were noted:

- Feedback on using “A” zones with farm status:

- The application process for farmers should have a tight timeline and be less onerous.
- A professional agrologist should review applications.
- Would this apply to larger farms, or also smaller farms who may need caretaker housing?
- **Is a Temporary Use Permit a good choice, similar to Central Saanich?**
 - PAAC supported using TUPs. They provide protection to the ALR and the application can be withdrawn if there are complications or issues.
- **The focus now is in temporary housing, but permanent housing could come up in discussion in the future.**
 - PAAC noted it would likely be the large-scale farms that would prefer a more permanent arrangement.
 - There is “temporary housing” and “temporary workers”.
 - Larger farms, like Michells, can have workers on a year-long basis and could need some permanent housing.

- This could be in the form of bunk-style housing, or trailers, with kitchen access.
- Temporary workers can vary from year to year; and they are not all necessarily “foreign” workers.
- Perhaps having a combination of temporary and permanent housing would be an option.
- **Suggested \$\$ threshold to determine farm status?**
 - In addition to the annual farm receipts, the issue of farm size should be considered.
 - One member noted that the gross income of the farm should be considered rather than the size. A 2-acre farm can produce \$100,000+ a year.
 - Another member suggested there should be a minimum size, but agreed the intensity of the farming should be included as well.
 - Pierre noted that 4ha aligns with the ALC recommendations but he agreed that small farms can have high production levels and this is something to consider.
 - Noted that if a farm is under 4 ha, then the income factor could come into play. That way you don't penalize a productive farmer on a smaller parcel who may employ a lot of workers.
- **Anything else to consider? Have we missed anything?**
 - Provide support to the farmers with the application process, which can often be onerous – especially for small-scale farmers.
 - A question was raised about protecting the workers against sub-standard housing. Pierre pointed out there are federal and provincial standards to adhere to, as well as the foreign country's standards if applicable. Inspections are carried out.
 - Emily Carmichael noted this year in particular there were many health and safety inspections due to COVID-19.

Pierre thanked the Commission for the comments and suggestions, noting he will keep PAAC up to date on the progress.

COMMENTS & UPDATES ON FARMING OPERATIONS SINCE MARCH, 2020

CORRESPONDENCE

- a) Letter to member councils requesting carbon sequestration be included as part of the next OCP reviews.
 - Ali Rivers, Central Saanich, stated she will be working to integrate carbon sequestration into the Central Saanich OCP review.
 - She has been investigating programs and funding related to agriculture & climate, and she will send members a summary of information to date. She has focused specifically on programs geared at carbon sequestration & farm ecosystem enhancement, and waste.
 - She noted the federal & provincial governments released sources of potential funding for the agricultural sector in 2021/22. Action plans and initiatives at all levels of government indicate increased ambition & opportunities related to these areas.
- b) Letter to Federal and Provincial Ministries of Agriculture re increased costs to **farm insurance**.
Note: This letter is pending as more information is required.

Discussion ensued:

- Insurance costs had increased by 30% regardless of the size of the operation.
- Buildings (infrastructure), equipment costs and live stock values are part of the reason.
- Replacement costs for these items have seen very large increases.
- The increases were applied to farms that have had no claims.
- Questioned if there was any potential help or support coming from the government.
- Dianne Williamson noted that if her barns and chickens were destroyed by fire, they would be out of production for a long time until everything was rebuilt. Insurance would have to cover the farm for an entire year more than likely. She estimates the infrastructure costs today would be between \$2 and \$3 million, not to mention the loss of business.
- Suggested a short letter be drafted noting the following points:
 - ➔ High percentage increases in all farm insurance (30%)
 - ➔ The difficulty in finding an insurance underwriter
 - ➔ Are the provincial and/or federal governments able to lend support

Emily Carmichael stated she knows of a representative from a Business Risk Management firm on the Island who may be willing to attend a meeting to discuss and answer questions. Members agreed this was an excellent idea. Emily will try to arrange for the March 11 meeting.
CARRY FORWARD to March

- c) Input provided to CRD's Waste Management Plan through its website; material drafted by Bob Maxwell.

OTHER BUSINESS

- a) Vancouver Island Agriculture Adaptation Group Meeting Feb 4. Bob Maxwell not present to provide update.
- b) PAAC Annual Report 2020 – Sub-Committee members requested to provide their reports as soon as possible. The Secretary will be working on the outline. Invoices for 2020 administration costs have been sent to the member municipalities. Costs were lower due to decrease in meetings and work carried out by PAAC last year due to COVID-19.
- c) **Membership 2021:** The Secretary spoke to Tammie Van Sweiten, District of Metchosin, regarding appointing Robin Tunnicliffe as a regular voting member rather than a non-voting Council representative. Robin had indicated she would still be able to keep council up to date on PAAC initiatives. Metchosin advised they would take the request to an In Camera meeting and let us know. We have one other person interested in joining PAAC, and with Robin this would bring us to our full complement of 11 members.
- d) **Langford ALR Exclusions:** Further to discussions at the January meeting regarding potential missing funds from ALR exclusions in Langford, investigation shows the City is using the money to buy farmland with a view to leasing it.

- e) **Woodwyn Farms:** Noted that the former 78 ha Woodwyn Farms has been transferred from the provincial government to the Tsartlip First Nations. Members questioned about future use of the agricultural land.
- The property was historically used by the Tsartlip Nation for hunting, farming and traditional practices and is next to the 1,000 member nation's only reserve.
 - It is not clear at this time what their intention is. If it is to be an addition to the adjacent reserve, they could basically do what they wish with it – additional housing, other infrastructure, or farm it. They will have full control.
 - There may be an agreement with the provincial government when they purchased it to leave the land with the fee simple classification.
 - Although it may be tragic to lose the productive farmland, population on the reserves is increasing and they need more housing.
 - <https://www.timescolonist.com/news/local/tsartlip-first-nation-acquires-traditional-territory-at-woodwyn-farms-1.24257076>
- f) The proposed closure of the Sobey's/Thrifty's warehouse and relocation of the head office to Eastern Canada was briefly mentioned at the January meeting.

The ramifications of this closure on local farmers who rely on shipping produce was again discussed, noting that perhaps a letter should be sent to the President of Sobey's outlining the concerns of the farmers by this change.

Terry Michell noted he will be shipping produce in March, and if he sees any change, he will be notifying Sobey's and the Vegetable Commission. He will keep on top of things and report back to PAAC.

CARRY to March Meeting

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

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 9:12 pm