

**PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION MEETING
HELD BY ZOOM
THURSDAY APRIL 8, 2021, 7:00 PM**

In attendance: Phil Christie, Chair; Linda Geggie; Bev Marley; Larry Sluggett; Robin Tunncliffe (Metchosin); Dianne Williamson; Councillors Thompson (Central Saanich), Smyth (North Saanich), and De Vries (Saanich); and Isobel Hoffmann, recording secretary.

Guests: Emily Carmichael, Ministry of Agriculture; Lisa Levesque; Jarret Mankovich and Andrea Pickard, Central Saanich Planning; Jeff Weightman, CRD; Mike Doehnel; Bob Maxwell; Anita Biljold.

Regrets: Larry Kimmett; Satnam Dheenshaw; Carol Davidson (Treasurer); Terry Michell;

Minutes: The Minutes of March 11, 2021 were adopted as circulated.

Treasurer's Report (Carol Davidson) – Not Present

- Brief discussion took place re the T-5 slip that was received for interest on our GICs (for approximately \$800).
- The Treasurer had looked into it, noting that a T-5 had been received in previous years and no action was taken because we are a non-profit.
- The Chair suggested we look into the matter further and report back at another a future meeting.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: NEW

New Regulatory Changes re Livestock – Lisa Levesque, BCAF

- Over six million live stock were lost during the massive outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease in the UK about 20 years ago. The livelihoods of many farms were devastated.
- In 2006, a national initiative led by provincial and federal governments and industry was introduced for cattle, bison, swine, sheep, goats and crevid (farmed deer) to allow an animal or a group of animals to be tracked throughout its life span.
- There are 3 pillars: Premises Identification (Provincial); and Animal Identification and Animal Movement (Federal).
- Premises ID is an emergency management tool that is only used to notify operators of a disease or natural disaster; facilitate rapid evacuation in an emergency; support tracking of animals in an emergency; facilitate disease control measures that may affect multiple livestock; and maintain market access by better managing emergencies.
- Next year, BC will join five other provinces where registration is mandatory (Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec and PEI).
- A nine digit identifier links livestock and poultry to specific geographic locations.
- Farmers complete a BC ID Registration of Livestock and poultry, using site specific locations from BC Land Titles. Privacy will be ensured and is critical to the programme.

- The Premises ID will be held to locate and track relocated animals during a national disaster, such as wild fires.
- Registration is free and takes about 10 minutes using various methods.
- People who care for animals who have one or more animals on their property, from alpacas to yaks, will be required to register. Even bees.
- The programme's intent is not to penalize, but to build knowledge and awareness and protect animals during an emergency or disaster.
- Participation in the programme is about being a good neighbour.
- During the 2017 wildfires, various regions across the province incorporated Premises ID: Caribou Regional District (re wildfire re-entry permitting process), Langley (a climate change emergency planning tool), Surrey and Delta (backyard chickens).
- More information on the programme at <http://www.gov.bc.ca/premisesidprogram>
- By email at BCPID@gov.bc.ca

Comments from the Commission were noted as follows:

- Surprised that other provinces are ahead of BC
- Firbank Poultry Farm already has a BC ID#
- Good to hear that the registration process will ensure privacy.
- In response to a question about backyard chickens, Lisa stated registration will be mandatory in 2022, and they would like to see cross compliance throughout each municipality. Some livestock organizations may require members to participate.
- In answer to a question about how the word will get out to the smaller backyard “farmers” with a few chickens, etc. Lisa advised brochures will be displayed at feed stores and the fair grounds, stickers advising of the programme will be added to bags of food and other supplies. We don't have a strong media presence and are relying on local governments and farm organizations to spread the word.
- Noted that many of the animals on the Peninsula are horses; the Horse Council of BC is supportive of the project and are holding a seminar next week.

Preserving Hedgerows and New Farm Practices – Bev Marley

Bev Marley stated:

- We all do lip service to climate change but often don't do anything about it. She has previously suggested having an independent sustainable farming specialist to evaluate farming on the Peninsula to make it more ecologically friendly and provide guidelines for farmers.
- Forests, wetlands and hedgerows all have value. She believes PAAC should instigate a study of the current farm practices.
- The technology is available and we should embrace it – consider vertical farming to save space, drones to advise what areas need water or fertilizer, and greenhouses so we can produce year-round, using less acreage so we can replant trees and hedgerows, allowing low-lying fields to revert to wetlands and ponds
- We have lost so many hedgerows recently, and they provide a vital habitat for native pollinators and birds; blackberries and other fruit provide food for this diverse group of beneficials.

- Hedgerows are also great wind-breakers which helps with soil and water erosion.
- Perhaps compensation from the province should be given to farmers who provide these vital spaces and use forward-thinking environmental improvements.
- Many fields are only used a few months of the year, although a few farmers now use cover crops that help with erosion, and grasses with longer roots help with carbon storage.
- Perhaps we need an education programme, and anyone claiming ALR status should be required attend.

Discussion noted:

- A lot of good points raised.
- Would be an excellent idea to have a speaker to talk about new farm practices and how we can be more sensitive to climate issues.
- Robin Tunnicliffe stated her farm in Metchosin received a subsidy from Habitat Acquisition Trust to fund 1000' of hedgerow. She matched that amount. The group also helped with the planting. The results are amazing and very beneficial.
- California has areas where hedgerows are planted adjacent to roads, producing micro-climates.
- Noted only 60% of the farmland on the Peninsula is actively farmed. Perhaps some of the 40% that is not used could be planted with hedgerows and to cultivate wetlands.
- Robin agreed to contact Habitat Acquisition Trust to see if they had someone who could speak to PAAC.

CARRY

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: CURRENT

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

- Responses received from the BC Wine Grape Council and the Wine Island Grape Growers Association (WIGA).
- At this time they were not interested in participating in a grape and fruit atlas that serves the South Vancouver Island Region.
- The BC Wine Grape Council noted it does not meet their funding programme guidelines, and at this time they are producing an Acreage Report for the the province which includes an assessment of vineyards and plantings on the Island and the Gulf Islands, to be released later next month, with subsequent reports every two years.
- It was suggested we contact the Agriculture and Agra-Food Canada (AAFC) researchers who have been working on a GIS mapping project for the province for assistance. WIGA may also be able to fill in some pieces as the proposed project proceeds.

CARRY for Further Discussion

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

- Emily Carmichael stated she had nothing to report, other than the fact that the ALC has decided to plan the celebration for 2023 – the year the ALR was actually formed.

Central Saanich OCP Review: Jarret Mankovich and Andrea Pickard, C. Saanich

- The Plan review is moving into Phase 2 – the engagement and consultation process.
- April was set aside for agricultural issues. Larry Sluggett, Terry Michell and Phil Christie have been invited to attend a virtual meeting. Other farmers are welcome to attend.
- Their attendance will be very welcome as the OCP Advisory Committee as very little farming knowledge.
- The District would be pleased to hear any major issues or concerns to address from PAAC.
- A virtual town hall meeting was held a few weeks ago, including a presentation from Naomi Smith with a Q&A open to the public; this will be available on line for viewing.
- Until the end of the month there are various on-line opportunities for the public, as individuals, a neighbourhood or a family, can contribute their ideas and suggestions, and generate community conversations.
- Over the summer, the District will be looking for more feedback for the final stage of the review – Analysis.
- Coordinating OCP reviews with neighbouring municipalities of North Saanich and Sidney and engaging with the two First Nations bands has been productive and resulting in interesting ideas and discussions.
- It was suggested PAAC may be interested in participating as well.
- Phil Christie will be presenting to the OCP Advisory Committee at the end of the month on emerging issues. This is important to the District as the economy is a major part of our land base.

The Chair asked the Municipality to let PAAC know when the meetings are being held and we will find a member to attend.

Discussion ensued:

- Noted there are many issues that concern farmers: flooding, drainage, geese, deer. These problems have been on-going for many years, and there is much information available.
- Mr. Mankovich agreed these are serious ongoing issues and perhaps the District needs to do a deeper dive of its own to gain more insight.
- The “Right to Farm Act” should be reviewed in depth.
- There is a dynamic between commercial farming, the need to produce larger amounts of food and the displacement of the natural environment. With everyone working together – the municipalities and PAAC, we can do better, keep the conversation going and become more progressive farmers.

Farm Worker Accommodations – Saanich – Pierre Iachetti – not present.

Increased Farm Insurance Rates – Info Session – Dianne Williamson

- Dianne stated that unfortunately the link to the information session did not work.
- Emily Carmichael advised she did not attend either but will bring forward PAAC's enquiry to the next info session.

- Dianne noted that her son has been appointed to the Canadian Food Council of Canada, reporting to the Minister, identifying emerging markets of interest, and reviewing current and proposed food policies. Out of 300 applicants, he was one of 24 appointed to the advisory council.

South Vancouver Island Farm Hub – Linda Geggie

There are three Food Hubs under development on the Island: Cowichan, Duncan and a local one on Viewfield Road in Esquimalt.

- The Viewfield Hub has 10,000 sq.ft of warehouse space, and the group has worked hard over the past few years to support not only “rescue” food and how it can be used but also to provide skills training, Support the SIFarmhub as well as for facility rentals to different producers.
- Business plans have been developed and the Ministry supports the concept for developing a Processing Hub.
- One of the ideas is to have a certified processing kitchen; they already have an Island Health certified testing kitchen but to also develop the HACCP Certified Kitchen.
- Additional refrigeration, temperature controlled storage, and training programmes for basic skills related to food handling are being explored.
- The South Island Farm Hub on Viewfield has distributed \$260,000 worth of food to date.
- The farmers get full price for their produce; working with charities and agencies such as the Mustard Seed, Songhees First Nations, School Districts, food has been distributed at lower costs to our schools and Our Place, as well as others.
- We are learning as we go and it is been a very good first year of operation.
- The Cowichan Co-op is running a similar programme, and increased their sales last year by 800%.
- Colleen Popyk has done a great job of coordinating distribution and Susan Tychie is leading development of the warehouse and the processing kitchen.
- Estimated it will take about six months to build the infrastructure within the warehouse.
- There has been lots of interest from people wanting to use the processing kitchen.
- They are working with farmers on high seasonal abundance and possible development of value added product lines like pesto or salsa.
- In response to a question, Linda stated the South Island Farm Hub provides “farm bucks” to the charities and agencies, who buy the fresh produce at 50% cost. This is possible due to a \$250,000 grant last year from the Jawl and Victoria Foundations.

COMMENTS & UPDATES ON FARMING OPERATIONS SINCE MARCH, 2020

No comments

CORRESPONDENCE

Responses received from Wine Island Growers Association (WIGA) and The BC Wine Grape Council further to the proposed Grape and Fruit Atlas. See discussion above.

OTHER BUSINESS

Vancouver Island Agriculture Adaptation Group – Bob Maxwell

- The next ZOOM meeting of the Adaptation Group will be April 18th.
- The group appears to be doing very well, initiating a project and engaging a consultant to identify silage crops, to determine the best types of grasses, rye, legumes, etc. to cultivate.
- These crops are good for dairy and beef cattle as well as other livestock.
- A few producers on the Island are involved in the project and the Group has members all over the Island.
- They have \$300,000 to spend for the new few years and he is looking forward to working with them.
- Another project is on pollination and how climate change can potentially affect pollinators – which ties into the lack of hedgerows issue discussed earlier. He will bring this matter to the Group's attention.

2020 Annual Report

The secretary advised the draft is almost complete; still waiting on two reports from Sub-Committee Chairs. It is hoped the Report can be distributed within the next week to our sponsoring Councils, as well as other local Councils, MLAs, MPs, Ministry of Agriculture and various farming groups and organizations.

Federal Funding Programme: Living Labs re Carbon Storage – Linda Geggie

Linda had sent information on this new programme via email but didn't know a lot of detail about it. Discussion noted:

- It is a soil based programme to determine levels of carbon sequestration in BC soils.
- There has been some discontinuity over the past few years and it is beneficial for the programme to be active again. \$10 million has been assigned to the programme.
- Any information on carbon sequestration will be beneficial for years to come.
- It is apparently linked to a local \$40,000 partnership grant through Investment Agriculture for municipalities to champion agricultural issues.

Saanich Councillor DeVries advised he works for the Ministry of Agriculture and he will be looking into this programme in more detail, noting there is no shortage of initiatives.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Wildfire Workshops

Emily Carmichael sent via email information on Wildfire Workshops on April 20 and 27, 2021.

Saanich Fair – Bob Thompson

- There WILL be a Saanich Fair this year – the type of Fair will of course be dependent on the Covid restrictions at the time, but he is hoping for the best option available, while still being cautious.
- What it will look like has not been determined yet. Perhaps different zones, limiting the size of groups at one time, perhaps a walk thru or drive thru model.
- He imagines there will be no congregating in larger groups or interactive displays.
- Discussions are on-going and he will keep the Commission up to date.

OTHER BUSINESS

For a few years, PAAC had a representative from the Minister's office attending meetings on a regular basis. This was an advantageous link between PAAC and the Minister; however, since that representative left the Ministry, we have no direct connection. Questioned whether it would be helpful to initiate this again, or is our connection with the Ministry through Emily Carmichael and Doug Pepper sufficient?

Emily advised her position with the Ministry has no direct connection with the Minister's office; any concerns or issues from PAAC have to pass "up the chain of command". It was also noted that staff in the Minister's office are "political", and not a direct part of the Ministry staff.

Members were asked if they wanted to lobby for another rep from the Minister's office; all agreed we are very fortunate to have two representatives from the Ministry (Emily and Zac DeVries) who are our "boots on the ground". However, we need to have a political influence as well, a conduit to the political side of things. Noted that our local MLA (Lana Popham) and MP (Adam Olsen) represent 30% of the land base on the Peninsula and PAAC would benefit from direct representation.

Recommended that a letter be sent the Minister Popham requesting a representative to attend PAAC meetings from the Minister's office.

Next Meeting: **Thursday, May 13, 2021, 7:00 pm by ZOOM**

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 8:45 pm