

**PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION MEETING
HELD BY ZOOM
THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 9, 2021, 7:00 PM**

In attendance: Phil Christie Chair; Carol Davidson; Bev Marley; Dianne Williamson; Robin Tunnicliffe, Larry Sluggett, Councillors Smyth (North Saanich) and De Vries (Saanich), and Isobel Hoffmann, recording secretary.

Guests: Paige Erikson-McGee, Habitat Acquisition Trust; Bob Maxwell, Mike Doehnel, Mike Wei.

Regrets: Linda Geggie; Larry Kimmett; Satnam Dheenshaw; Terry Michell, Councillor Graham (C. Saanich), Emily Carmichael, Ministry of Agriculture.

Minutes: The Minutes of June 10, 2021 were adopted as circulated.

Treasurer's Report (Carol Davidson) – No significant changes to report.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: NEW

Drought & Hay Shortages in BC – No response was received to PAAC's August 25, 2021 letter to the Minister's office, nor to our request to have a representative attend.

Bev Marley stated:

- She spoke to the BC Horse Council about hay shortages and was told that cattlemen are bringing in hay from Ontario.
- Right now, there seems to be no major issue in the BC horse industry with hay shortages.
- When she owned horses, she used to buy hay from Washington state and Alberta.
- She agreed we need to protect our own hay supplies.

A note was received from Emily Carmichael, who was unable to attend this evening, stating that the Agricultural Recovery Programme was launched last week to support eligible producers. The Ministry has an Emergency Management BC Programme for agricultural producers impacted by the flooding and wildfires.

***Note: The Chair had to leave the meeting unexpectedly , and Robin Tunnicliffe assumed the Chair.

PRESENTATION: Mike Wei, Well Water Rights

- He used to work for the Ministry of Environment and helped to develop the *Water Sustainability Act*, and is now a part-time consultant.
- For over 100 years the use of surface water has not been licensed; in 1960 the BC Government claimed jurisdiction over the use of groundwater but never introduced legislation until 2016 when the *Water Sustainability Act* (WSA) came into effect.
- The Act does recognize the historic use the groundwater by landowners prior to this Act.
- Non-domestic groundwater users will require a license, including well users and they must apply for statutory use.
- Well water for household use does not require to be licensed.

- It is estimated there are between 80,000 and 100,000 well users throughout the province: municipalities, private farms, hotels, fish hatcheries, bottling companies, home based businesses, etc. – they will all require a license.
- Landowners who used well water prior to 2016 will have until March 2022 to apply for a license in order to have their historic use recognized.
- Once you have applied, you may continue to use the well water until the license is granted. If a person has been historically using the well water prior to 1960, the application fee is waived, but you still have to apply.
- The license is tied to the land – not the owner.
- He is concerned by the lack of applications which could result in the loss of the owners' statutory rights to use the well water and the loss of the historical use.
- This is a harsh consequence and he believes it is due to the lack of information, and understanding the consequences – many people are simply not aware of this requirement.
- An application received after the March 2022 deadline is considered a new user: a technical assessment will be required and that could cost between \$10,000 and \$20,000.
- Legally, without a valid license you should not be accessing the well water – but it could take three or four years before a license is granted.
- If you apply after the deadline, you may not even get a license.
- It is estimated there are over 20,000 ground water users for non-domestic use, but as of this summer, only 4,000 applications have been received – less than 20%.
- He believes the vast majority of private farms, mills, breweries, pubs, indigenous bands, etc. do not know about this. The government is doing a poor job in getting the word out.
- BC is one of the few provinces that charges for the use of water. Some people see this as a tax grab, they also question how the government will be able to check for well water use.
- Water rental rates are historical and relatively low, it costs the government more money to collect water rental fees than the fee itself.
- New farmers and other businesses will shy away from properties that don't have legal and licensed access to water.
- He doesn't see the requirement for water licenses going away: it is what is needed for water sustainability.
- He recommends people let the government know of their frustrations about the lack of information, but also to apply for a license prior to the deadline.
- He distributed a poster for general information about the WSA, and he asked PAAC members to display and/or forward to others who need to know this information.

For more information:

Video on how to apply for licence for existing non-domestic groundwater use:

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/michele-lepitre90b0b225_existing-use-groundwater-application-howactivity-6816830891306954752-qvHr

Blog posts on groundwater licensing in BC:

Hydro Geo Logic - Home (hydrogeo-logic.com)

Mike Wei, P. Eng. Consulting Hydrogeologist, former Deputy Comptroller of Water Rights
waterwei@telus.net or 250-213-822

Proposed Farm Tour for Councillors with Brian Spencer, Applied Bio-Nomics

It has been suggested that PAAC invite Councillors and Municipal Staff on a tour of a local farm with Brian Spencer of Applied Bio-Nomics, similar to the tour PAAC members attended in July, on the use of bugs rather than pesticides to help with crop protection.

Both Councillors present at the meeting today indicated an interest and suggested information be sent to the Councils.

- The secretary to check first with Brian Spencer on his availability, then write to the Councils to ascertain interest.
- Haliburton Farms was suggested as a possible location. The Secretary to confirm if they would be interested.

CARRY to the next meeting

Golden Nematode

At the farm tour this past July, the question of whether the current regulations regarding Golden Nematode, mostly in Central Saanich, should be lifted as it is perhaps no longer necessary, was raised at the Farm Tour in July.

- Robin noted that she got a letter exempting her Metchosin property from the controls because no evidence of the Golden Nematode was found.
- Larry advised he had his soil tested; the samples were good but he has never heard back.
- All agreed it would be prudent to have an expert come to PAAC to talk about it.
- Max stated that Central Saanich has been working on the issue (for about 30 years!), but it could still be while before any information is available.
- The region used to grow lots of potatoes and tomatoes.
- Suggested that we ask Emily Carmichael if she can find out any information from the Ministry's perspective; if not, then a letter should be sent to the Minister requesting action.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: CURRENT

a) Saanich Farm Worker Housing Policy Update – Pierre Iachetti

Not present

b) Funding for Hedgerows: Paige Erikson from HAT to attend

- She thanked PAAC for their funding contribution towards the hedgerow and wetland restoration programme.
- The next step would be to form a small working group, including herself, Laura Morrandin of the Pollinator Partnership Programme, and a couple of PAAC members and/or people with existing hedgerows on their farmland, to help develop a grant application process.
- Agreed that Robin, Bev, and Max would join Paige and Laura to get the programme started.

- Noted that timing is important re planting of hedgerows; we could miss the window of opportunity for this year if we wait too long.
- Important to keep the application process simple so it doesn't tie up the farmers' time.
- Suggested the group could reach out through the Farmer-2-Farmer network and the DFMA to get the word out about the programme.
- Information posters can be displayed in key areas: Buckerfields, Integrity Sales, etc.
- Suggested any ideas to initiate the process be put in an email to the group.

Discussion noted that Central Saanich recently cut down an entire hedgerow. It was further noted that North Saanich has a good policy for trimming hedgerows, taking into account pollinators, birds etc. The municipalities should be kept informed of the progress of this project so they have a better understanding.

Councillor Smyth advised that North Saanich had a committee to look at hedgerows and this has now facilitated into a Stewardship Committee. He will talk to staff and Central Saanich and report back.

Michael Doehnel noted that he planted 3 acres of flax this winter. He had a lot of bees and many flowers through May, June and July. Traditionally flax is planted in the spring. Thousands of acres of flax are planted on the prairies. He harvested the flax seeds (about 1.5 tons) and will plant as a cover crop this year.

C) Increased Farm Insurance Rates – Dianne Williamson

As of May 1st all tractors and farm vehicles will have to have license plates and there will be no 3rd party liability for tractors.

COMMENTS, UPDATES, CONCERNS RE FARMING OPERATIONS

- Max noted the heat dome this summer caused some trouble with the raspberries and he was considering shade material to protect the crops next year. In the end, only the first flush was lost due to the heat; once the temperatures dropped to normal the crop yield was good.
- Councillor Smyth used shade cloth to protect his loganberry and blueberry crops. Even though the cloth can last for years, it was expensive, \$600 for 100 feet.
- Robin reported her farm saw high yields due to the heat dome: particularly with corn and onions. The metal posts attaching the landscape cloth to protect the berry crops got dangerously hot.
- In the Mt. Vernon area, thousands of acres of berries have been protected under tunnels for the past 10 years.

CORRESPONDENCE

- a) 1741 Verling Road: Referral from Central Saanich re proposed rezoning and non-farm use on ALR property.

- The intent is to build a hospital to mostly accommodate large animals (eg: horses).
- Comments noted:
 - There is not enough places for large animals and there is a desperate need.
 - Bev noted this is one of the reasons she does not keep sheep any more.
 - Others pointed out the land could be used for small-scale vegetable growing, which is also needed. Noted as properties are sold – and there have been a few on Oldfield Road – vegetable and berry crops get less and less and equestrian use increases.
 - One downside of equestrian use in the Oldfield Road area is there is pollution caused by run-off from the property to Elk lake and surrounding streams.

Comments received by email from the Chair after the meeting:

- A large animal vet clinic is critically important to a healthy agriculture community.
 - Recommended that Central Saanich look at safety improvements at the corner of Verling and Old West Saanich Road. There is a very steep, blind intersection and it is anticipated traffic volumes would increase with the proposed clinic.
- b) Letter to HAT regarding PAAC's funding for the Hedgerow and Wetlands Project (see discussion above)
 - c) Letter to Minister of Agriculture re proposed policy for hay shortages in BC. No response received to date but see discussion above
 - d) Letter to Central Saanich providing comments re rezoning at 7067 East Saanich Road Received for information.

OTHER BUSINESS

Vancouver Island Agriculture Adaptation Group – Bob Maxwell

No updates at this time. Assumed the group is wrapping up some of their studies this fall.

UPCOMING EVENTS: None

OTHER BUSINESS

Water Report – Michael Doehnel

- He attended the Water Advisory Committee (WAC) meeting last week where a proposed review of the current water rates was announced.
- The CRD Integrated Water Services and the Regional Water Supply Commission decided to hire a consultant in October to conduct the review.
- He will keep the Commission informed.

- Noted North Saanich had a problem with water supply this summer, with the reservoir levels dropping so low that it could not be refilled. We will likely continue to see this happening and we may have to decide between watering for food or watering shrubs.

Next Meeting: **Thursday, October 14, 2021, 7:00 pm by ZOOM**

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 8:45 pm

Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary

PARKING LOT (Pending Issues)

1. T-5 slip from 2020 further to interest on PAAC's GIC
2. Grape & Fruit Atlas for Vancouver Island
3. 50th Celebration of ALR 2022 (ALC & Ministry of Agriculture)
4. Appointment of new representative from Minister's Office
5. Rising cost of farm insurance
6. Additional Farm Tours with Brian Spencer for Council members