

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

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In attendance: Phil Christie Chair; Carol Davidson; Bev Marley; Terry Michell; Dianne Williamson; Larry Sluggett, Councillors Smyth (North Saanich) De Vries (Saanich), and Graham (C.Saanich), Emily Carmichael, Ministry of Agriculture, and Isobel Hoffmann, recording secretary.

Guests: Bob Maxwell.

Regrets: Linda Geggie; Larry Kimmitt; Satnam Dheenshaw, Robin Tunnicliffe

Minutes: The Minutes of September 9, 2021 were adopted as circulated.

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**Treasurer's Report (Carol Davidson)** – Carol reported a balance of \$1,586 in PAAC's chequing account and \$20,805 in the Term Deposit.

**AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: NEW**

- a) PAAC's response to Central Saanich re a proposed large animal veterinary hospital at 1741 Verling Road generated discussion:
- While most members supported the concept of a veterinary hospital/clinic specifically for large farm animals (eg: horses, cows, pigs, sheep), there were some comments via email from a couple of members that generated further discussion.
  - A major concern was that the clinic be used for its intended purpose and not change to a regular veterinary clinic for small and domestic animals.
  - Others were concerned that the proposed “non-farm use” does nothing to ensure the continuing viability of food and hay production on the Peninsula.
  - The contention that horses are not considered farm animals by some was again raised. However it was also acknowledged that horses do have their place in the local economy, and is it any different than growing hops or grapes for making beer and wine, or flowers, that do not necessarily contribute to the “food chain” ?
  - It was noted that the number of equestrian facilities seem to be increasing on the Peninsula, taking away from food production. There has been a major change over the past 10 years or so and could be part of the reason agricultural land prices are increasing. If the trend continues, it could lead to food security issues.
  - We have a vast amount of agricultural land on the Island that is under-used.
  - The BC Horse Council keeps records on the number of horses and equestrian facilities. Bev offered to get some information on current statistics. The Peninsula at one time had the highest ratio of horses anywhere in Canada.

Agreed to Carry this topic for further discussion.

**(b) South Island Prosperity Partnership**

- A request was received from SIPP asking if someone with a farm and wants to lease land to the South Island Prosperity Partnership for a mobile abattoir.

- **Contact Kieran Buggy**, Manager of Operations; 778-265-8128 (office; 604-355-5970 (cell)

## **AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: CURRENT**

### **a) Saanich Farm Worker Housing Policy Update – Pierre Iachetti**

Not present

### **b) Funding for Hedgerows:**

Bob Maxwell, who is part of the sub-committee for the hedgerows project, stated:

- Several farms have been potentially selected as a starting point – ones with good visibility of the hedgerows along access roads in North and Central Saanich and Metchosin – and Paige Erikson from HAT has visited some of the farms.
- Farmers have to be prepared to maintain the hedgerows, which would include flowers and shrubs that attract pollinators. Important that invasive species are kept under control from the start.
- Draft guidelines are being developed.
- He noted that HAT has done similar projects before and have the expertise.

### **c) Golden Nematode Restrictions in Central Saanich**

Emily Carmichael stated:

- This is controlled by federal and provincial agencies. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency takes the lead role in the prevention of new pests and plants in Canada.
- There are three parts to the Golden Nematode order: production of potatoes, eggs and tomatoes.
- The Plant Protection Act also regulates the Golden Nematode.
- She acknowledged that the restrictions were put in place many years ago and it is been a long time since evidence of the golden nematode has been found.
- It affects inter-provincial trade as well as trade with the USA.
- Reports have been published for CFIA and wider surveys done every five years or so.
- She has asked CFIA for the original study results and the latest information and whether they intend to lift the quarantine restrictions in Central Saanich. Perhaps someone from CFIA would attend a PAAC meeting.
- Discussion noted that if CFIA has conducted surveys and not shared the results with the farming community then it becomes a political issue.
- We need to know if nematodes are still a risk; Central Saanich used to grow profitable crops of potatoes and tomatoes. The legislation needs to be changed if there is no evidence of nematodes in the soil.
- At one time there were thousands of acres of potatoes grown on the Island, now it is in the hundreds. This indicates just how much we need to import.

**Agreed that PAAC invite a representative from CIFA to attend a PAAC meeting.**

### **(d) Farm Tour for Councillors with Brian Spencer of Controlled Bio-Nomics**

- Agreed it would be a better option to wait for the spring to arrange a tour.

## **COMMENTS, UPDATES, CONCERNS RE FARMING OPERATIONS**

Terry Michell stated:

- He doesn't have the water bills yet, but a lot of water was used for irrigation this past summer due to the drought.
- Thrifty's is not the company it was before Sobey's took over. There are no local buyers any more – you have to talk to someone in Quebec and the time zone can be an issue.
- Orders have reduced significantly; down at least \$300,000 or more.
- He hopes they will eventually have a local buyer in BC again.
- Larry Sluggett also noted there are difficulties dealing with Sobey's compared to Thrifty's.
- Orders are placed at the last minute; if we know what they want ahead of time, we can plant accordingly.
- BC regulates the price of root crops, which permits farmers to stay in business. With Sobey's, an order is placed at an agreed upon price and shipped when requested, but when it comes time to pay, the payment is less than what was agreed to.
- The Vegetable Commission has tried to tell them how it works in BC but nothing changes. If we don't follow the minimum pricing they will buy it cheaper from other provinces.
- Terry noted this has been his most frustrating year in 25 years – going from the best company in BC to one of the worst. No personal contact – everything is handled via email.

Dianne Williamson held her 4<sup>th</sup> annual event at Firbank Farm where kids can make crafts from pumpkins and squash, play games and win prizes. It's free family event. The first year about 50 kids participated. This year, there were over 250 attending.

## **CORRESPONDENCE**

- a) 1741 Verling Road: Reply from PAAC to Central Saanich re proposed rezoning and non-farm use on ALR property. (see discussion on page 1).
  - Councillor Graham suggested that a covenant could be placed on the veterinary clinic to ensure it is maintained as proposed – a place to treat large farm animals: horses, cows, pigs, sheep, etc., and not be changed to a clinic for domestic pets.
  - The issue will be discussed by Council on October 18<sup>th</sup>.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

### **Vancouver Island Agriculture Adaptation Group – Bob Maxwell**

- Bob Maxwell advised that the group is still active and completing various projects.
- Government funds of \$300,000 have been allotted to the programme which will allow it to operate through to 2023.
- The Alberni water study is on-going; data is being assessed by a tech company.

- A project in the Alberni Valley regarding water flows is under consideration; it would be expensive to run pipelines and build dams. It seems strange to him that there is so much water in the Valley and yet they can't do a better job of getting water to the farmers during droughts in the summer.
- There have been some good discussions on Integrated Pest Management.
- A study is ongoing on winter vegetables and crop diversity.
- He is not sure on the status of the Silage project.
- He is impressed with the management of the people involved in this Group. Everyone is very concerned about the issues and there is good input at the ZOOM meetings.

Emily Carmichael noted that while the Ministry financially supports this group as part of the Climate Action Initiative, and she sits on several committees, it operates independently from the Ministry.

**UPCOMING EVENTS:** Emily Carmichael noted there is a series of webinars on Climate Action hosted by the Ministry. Information has been sent to PAAC.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

### **Central Saanich Agricultural Advisory Committee**

Larry Sluggett raised the issue of reinstating the Central Saanich Agricultural Advisory Committee once again. He and Terry Michell sat on the committee and would both like to see it re-established.

- In January 2020, a letter was sent to Central Saanich Council with the following Motion: “That PAAC write to Central Saanich Council expressing disappointment in the dissolution of the Agricultural Advisory Committee and requesting that it be reinstated because it provided a voice for local farmers and feedback to PAAC.”
- The matter was discussed at PAAC's January, February and March 2020 meetings.
- The rationale given for discontinuing the Ag Advisory Committee was because the municipality was shifting to “select committees” or a task force format established for a specific purpose. As well as cost issue, the municipality stated there was overlap with PAAC and the Ag Advisory Committee.
- Discussion noted that there is a new administrator at Central Saanich and perhaps PAAC should raise the issue again, noting that most BC municipalities have their own Agricultural Advisory Committee.
- Flooding issues in particular are a major issue that farmers have been trying to resolve for many years without success. Both Saanich and Central Saanich should work together on this serious issue. The Martindale Valley has major flooding every single year.
- In response to questions, it was noted that the Advisory Committee had five members who were all local farmers. Farmers have the practical knowledge to deal with agricultural issues.
- Martindale Valley is a major food growing area in Central Saanich. With the proposed flyover on the Pat Bay at Keating, it is anticipated that the construction will exacerbate the existing flood conditions. Not to mention the oil patches on the highway that flow down into the ditches and fields with the flood waters.

- PAAC wants to support farming on a regional basis throughout the Peninsula, Saanich and Metchosin. A local advisory group would be beneficial.
- Councillor Smyth stated that North Saanich has an agricultural committee, who provide advice to Council when asked as Council does not have the same understanding of the issues as a farmer. This is part of the problem with the Terms of Reference for PAAC as it can't be pro-active.
- Councillor Graham stated in his personal opinion:
  - It is not a lack of interest from the Municipality that is preventing the flooding issues to be addressed: the Martindale area also involves Saanich.
  - There is a reason this group is called the "Peninsula" agricultural commission, and is equipped to help farmers across the region, together with the provincial and municipal support it receives. Half of the members on PAAC are Central Saanich farmers.
  - Central Saanich is not trying to silence agriculture, but rather focus its resources without duplication. It is unfair and inappropriate to say it is not interested in agriculture.
  - He agreed Martindale was a big issue and should have a broad perspective.
  - PAAC has been willing to raise concerns regarding agriculture – farm worker housing for example – and Central Saanich is appreciative of its support.
  - He feels it is better to support PAAC and get the best expert advice or opinions.

PAAC discussion noted:

- Food production is higher in Central Saanich than the other regional municipalities.
- At one time, PAAC had sub-committees to discuss issues such as drainage and land use. It was an efficient way of working through various issues. The drainage committee could be reinstated, perhaps with staff from Saanich and Central Saanich as well.
- Noted this compromise could work and maybe a better option than reinstating the Central Saanich Agricultural Advisory Committee.

MOTION: Moved by Larry Sluggett and Seconded by Carol Davidson: "That PAAC reinstate its Drainage Sub-committee on an ad hoc basis, and recommend to the Councils of Saanich and Central Saanich that a staff member and/or Council representative be part of the sub-committee, for the initial purpose of finding a solution to address the flooding issues in the Martindale Valley.

CARRIED

Bev Marley stated that the owners of the property at the intersection of Wallace Drive and Stellys Cross Road just completed remediation of their soil. This area used to flood onto Wallace Drive. She talked to the owner and let them know that PAAC members would be interested in a tour of their property.

The Chair agreed it would be interesting to hear more about it. Bev will contact the owners.

## The Water Act & Well Licensing

Carol Davidson stated:

- She suggested that PAAC host a public meeting, inviting the relevant ministries, to speak to owners of small holdings.
- The Water Act deals with larger business, excludes domestic use, but not smaller farms.
- She thinks the proposed registration of wells is not going to be enforceable and it is quite punitive.
- For example: her neighbour has 30 chickens and is annoyed that she will have to register her well. Chickens drink 3 gallons of water a day compared to 30 gallons for horses.
- BC is the only province that does not have ground water controls.
- Hopefully a public session would result in constructive comments that will help the Ministry of Agriculture. The Ministry did not write the Act, but they tried to make it work.
- The cost of the well licence would be \$60/year and there is no way of policing it because there are no meters.
- She called the number noted on Mike Wei's poster and spoke to two people. She was advised if you only have 30 chickens you don't need to register your well. According to a recent article in the Times Colonist, it is costing the Ministry more to administer the licence than what they would receive in revenue.
- If this is the case, why would they bother with small holdings.

The Chair suggested we should defer further discussion as there seems to be a lack of information. There is definitely a gap and perhaps there should be some other aspects to the regulations.

Emily Carmichael stated there will be some information sessions held this fall. She will ask the Ministry's water specialist to attend a PAAC meeting. He has been working hard to make sure the people who need to know are well informed.

CARRY to next meeting.

## Special Award: The Dexter Cattle Society

Carol Davidson received information this morning from England inviting her to become an honorary life member of the Society in recognition of her contributions to the Breed. She is the only person outside England the Society has so honoured. Congratulations Carol!

Next Meeting: **Thursday, November 18, 2021, 7:00 pm by ZOOM**  
Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 9:05 pm

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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. 50<sup>th</sup> 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 (Spring 2022)