

**PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION MEETING  
HELD BY ZOOM  
THURSDAY FEBRUARY 10, 2022, 7:00 PM**

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In attendance: Robin Tunnicliffe in the Chair; Linda Geggie; Bev Marley; Larry Sluggett; Dianne Williamson; Councillor Thompson (C. Saanich) and Councillor Smyth (N.Saanich), and Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary.

Guests: Mike Doehnel; Anita Bull; Emily Carmichael, Ministry of Agriculture; Bob Maxwell; Andrea Pickard, Planner, Central Saanich; Lesley Hatch, Saanich Engineering.

Regrets: Satnam Dheenshaw, Terry Michell

Minutes: The Minutes of January 13, 2022 were adopted as circulated.

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**TREASURER'S REPORT** – Nothing to report

**SPEAKER'S BUREAU** – No speakers scheduled

**AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: NEW**

The Chair stated:

- As people who understand farming, we must be visionary and plan for the next generation of farmers. Decisions we make now will change the physical and cultural landscape.
- There are many groups that speak to the value of land, economics and politics, but we are farmers and we have to come together with a united voice to focus on and support farming.
- She recommends in all our policy decisions we consider the precedents we could be setting.
- We have two applications from Saanich tonight regarding non-farm use on ALR land to use outbuildings for rental storage for recreational vehicles.
- Her neighbour in Metchosin, a sheep and hog farmer, searched unsuccessfully over most of the Island for a storage area large enough for his hogs; he eventually spent over a million dollars to build a barn of his own.

- a) **4251 Blenkinsop Road** (Ernst Koettl) – Application for non-farm use in the ALR
  - The application is to use a portion of the property for rental storage for recreational vehicles as well as rental storage within two barns on the property.
- b) **4400 Blenkinsop** (Gordon and Valerie Galey) – Application for non-farm use in the ALR
  - The application is to use two former poultry barns for rental storage.

Planning has asked PAAC to comment either with no objection; generally no objections with suggested changes or concerns; or does not support the project – and provide reasons.

PAAC discussion noted the following:

- If the application is approved by Saanich and the ALC, the storage use should be attached to the owner's name and not the land title. This would mean the use cannot be passed on to someone else, guaranteeing it remains as a farm.

- Apparently one of the applicants was using their barns for rental storage without permission; the ALC has advised they will not approve a commercial use on the ALR property. The barns are a small portion of the entire property.
- PAAC's strategic objectives are really clear about what we are supposed to be doing. We need to protect the farmland for today and the future.
- It was questioned why we are being asked for a professional opinion on what is essentially a zoning issue and nothing to do with agriculture.
- Blenkinsop Valley is a sitting duck for the future. These applications are a questionable use and do not benefit farmland; nor do they meet the ALC's mandate, which is a primary criteria for support.
- The peatlands are over 30' deep in the lower part of the valley; it is doubtful future development could take place in this area.
- Non-Farm use on ALR lands is something that is now done consistently; there is so much pressure and increasing demand for land.
- If an application for non-farm use benefits agriculture, or if it is an ancillary function that would enhance the farming operation, then it should be considered.
- Renting barns for recreational vehicle storage does not benefit farming – other than providing extra income to the farmer. It is acknowledged that many farmers are struggling, and these applicants are bona fide farmers.
- Approving these applications will also set a dangerous precedent – although every application should be considered on a case by case basis.
- Policing, through Bylaw Enforcement Officers, could also be an issue.

**MOTION:** Moved by Linda Geggie and Seconded by Larry Sluggett: “That the Peninsula & Area Agricultural Commission does not support the applications for non-farm use on properties at 4451 and 4400 Blenkinsop Road because it could set a precedent, and the use does not support existing farming operations.”

- Emily Carmichael noted that the municipalities can refer ALR applications to the Ministry of Agriculture for comment; and PAAC could do the same.

The Motion was then Put and Carried.

## **AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: CURRENT**

- a) **Saanich Farm worker Housing Policy – Carry; Pierre Iachietti not present**
- b) **Funding for Hedgerows (Project with HAT)**

Paige Erikson from Habitat Acquisition Trust, sent a first draft of the application and general information about the Hedgerow project, which was circulated to all members prior to the meeting.

Comments were noted as follows:

- Having a brochure to hand out to farmers would be beneficial to introduce the programme and get the word out, as it is assumed not many people know about it.

- One concern was the reference to a specific nursery rather than naming a few that sell native plants; it seems that we would be subsidizing one particular nursery.
- Noted that the information, once finalized, could be posted on municipal websites, perhaps the CRD as well, to promote the programme.
- Bob Maxwell noted he has seen around 20 farms with over-exposure to roads that would be good candidates for the programme.
- Laura Morrandin from the Island Pollinators group is working with HAT.
- Robin, who successfully planted a hedgerow last year with HAT's assistance will send before and after pictures which could be used in the brochure and on the websites.
- Paige Erikson to be advised accordingly.

**c) Central Saanich OCP Update** – Andrea Pickard, Central Saanich

A draft of the revised OCP was circulated to members before the meeting, and Andrea spoke to the overall plan, with emphasis on the agricultural component as follows:

- The current OCP was adopted in 2008. The purpose of this update is to:
  - Ensure it reflects current values and priorities
  - Integrate a number of existing plans (Active Transportation, Residential Infill)
  - Prepare for challenges and opportunities that lie ahead
- This next phase will involve public and stakeholder input, which will be open until March 6, when revisions and photos will be added before being presented to Council in April.
- A public hearing will then be scheduled, at which time there may be a call for further revisions, or the OCP will be adopted.
- One of the draft principles is to support agriculture and food security, with the following objectives:
  - a) Abundant Food Production
  - b) Thriving Farm Community
  - c) Integrate First Nations Food Systems
  - d) Environmental Stewardship
  - e) Climate Action
  - f) Protect Community Character
- Protecting and supporting farming remains strong as well as encouraging diversification in farm operations.
- Policies on promotion and farm marketing support and continued efforts to improve storm drainage and encourage property owners to allow W̱SÁNEĆ Nations access for traditional harvesting and gathering.
- New subdivisions are not supported; policies for boundary adjustment will be included, as well as for ALC exclusion applications (legislative changes).
- Part of the implementation policy will be to continue to support PAAC, and develop a farm marketing and promotion programme.
- Continue with municipal operations for ditches, drainage, wildlife, and invasive species .
- Other policy issues include the priority actions in the 2011 Agricultural Area Plan Advocacy, BC Assessment on farm status, CRD bulk water rates, Provincial and Federal review of the Golden Nematode restrictions.

- Regarding Economic Development and Agriculture Related Economic Policies, topics to be considered for support include: agri-tourism; farm promotion; B&B's, and agri-tourism accommodation; and retention of agriculture-related industries. Non-farm uses on agricultural land will not be supported, unless they relate directly to farming.
- Regarding Municipal Infrastructure: Ensure infrastructure services consider long-term sustainability and resiliency; continue to advance stormwater management including agricultural drainage; collaborate with Saanich, WSÁNEĆ, and PAAC to improve drainage in the McHugh-Noble Creek Watershed; continue to work with the agricultural community to improve the management of stormwater and drainage issues on agricultural lands.

Next Steps – to Completion:

- Take the survey before March 6 (available at Municipal Hall)
- Email [OCP@csaanich.ca](mailto:OCP@csaanich.ca) or call 250-544-4209 to talk to Planning staff
- Visit: [LetsTalkCentralSaanich.ca/OCP](http://LetsTalkCentralSaanich.ca/OCP)

Phase 4 - April onward (anticipated date)

- A Final Draft of the OCP to be prepared and presented to Council for consideration
- Schedule and hold Public Hearing
- Consider revisions to the draft OCP
- Final Adoption

- d) Proposed Drainage Sub-Committee** – Both Saanich and Central Saanich have assigned staff to participate in the Drainage Sub-Committee: Lesley Hatch from Saanich who oversees water, sewer and drainage issues; and Jennifer Lukianchuk, the senior climate action and natural resources coordinator at Central Saanich.. PAAC members will be Terry Michell, Larry Sluggett and Mike Doehnel.
- To date no council representation has been appointed, although it was requested by PAAC. It appears the Councils are not necessarily opposed to appointing a representative, but feel that staff are the ones with the expertise.
  - It was agreed that PAAC make a further request to appoint council members to the group.
  - A suggestion was made to include Maber Flats along with Martindale Valley within the scope of the project. However, although both areas have serious flooding issues with a notable decline in productive farming, it was agreed to concentrate on one area at a time, starting with Martindale Valley. With the proposed overpass at Keating X Road and the Pat Bay Hwy, the current situation could be exacerbated.
  - At times there can be 3' of water or more on a farm, and it takes a long time to drain.
  - Years ago, it used to be about one foot of water.
  - Noted that the level of this year's flooding could be caused by our extreme weather, which unfortunately could be a regular occurrence now with climate change.
  - Discussion ensued on the next steps in the process, how to keep the momentum going.
  - Noted that a comprehensive *Water Management Plan* was completed by Central Saanich about 10 years ago with the help of the CRD; we should try to obtain a copy of the document.

- The CRD's *Integrated Storm Water Management Plan* identified key hot spots.
- It was questioned whether representation from the CRD and/or the Ministry, and First Nations, would be helpful as well as input from an independent agrologist.
- The agrologist would be able to identify the water requirements for a farm, and if provision should be made to store the water for future use rather than draining it into the ocean.
- Agreed we need a complete overview of what is happening in farming – look at the bigger picture and define goals for the future rather than just immediate goals.
- Emily Carmichael stated the Ministry has a water team, with engineers or hydrologists. PAAC, or the drainage committee, would have to decide what type of expertise they are looking for.
- Suggested that perhaps these experts, and any others identified, could be called upon as a resource from time to time – perhaps note in the Terms of Reference.
- There is no confusion on where the flood waters are coming from and the damage they cause. The issue of possible storage of these waters is an excellent suggestion.
- Another aspect to consider is the historical use of peat lands and bogs. Most peat lands were 6' to 8' higher – much deeper than they are today - before historical drainage took place.
- Farmers have been on these lands for over 100 years and some areas have now reached the original clay soils at the bottom. This is in part because we are not replenishing our soils with composts and manures. Organic waste is being sent to the mainland instead.
- Global warming, carbon sequestration and protection of our wetlands and forests are other issues to be considered.
- Councillor Thompson noted it is the province that sets regulations for farmland not local governments. In terms of policies, we cannot do something that impedes the business of farming and agriculture.
- Perhaps a portion of each farm could be a designated wetland or forest as opposed to encouraging farmers to drain all the land and chop down trees: we need to be environmentally conscious.

Next Steps: The secretary will contact all members of the sub-committee; PAAC members will initially discuss and draft the Terms of Reference before calling the first meeting of the group.

**e) Water Update – Michael Doehnel**

- Regarding the request to arrange for a speaker from the Water Commission to talk to PAAC about the agricultural water rates, Mike stated the Water Commission has been unable to hire a consultant to look into water rates across the board.
- It has been almost two years since PAAC wrote the letter to Ted Robbins about the difference in water rates between municipalities and no response has been received.

MOTION: Moved by Bev Marley and Seconded by Linda Geggie: “That PAAC write a letter to Ted Robbins at the Regional Water Commission regarding our initial enquiry, and requesting an update on the current status of the water rates.”

CARRIED

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

### Discussions with FIRB re poultry issues and rising costs:

- Dianne stated a meeting was held January 19 with FIRB (Farm Industry Review Board), the BCCMB (BC Chicken Marketing Board), three main processors, and the BC Chicken Growers Association, to discuss concerns about the rising costs of operating poultry farms.
- The intent is to get the Cost of Production (COP) changed to reflect the rising cost of feed.
- The grower has to continue to absorb the rising cost of feed, and this has been an on-going problem for 2 years.
- Many BC growers are on their last legs and it is hard to keep their heads above water.
- The last feed invoice saw another increase of \$25/ton and because we are regulated as a commodity, growers are not permitted to raise the prices of eggs or meat.
- FIRB could take another two or three months to make a decision .
- Discussed whether a letter should be sent to FIRB indicating that the price of poultry and eggs is not keeping up with the cost of feed other costs.
- Some growers recently met with the Ministry of Agriculture to discuss the COP; they have yet to meet with the Minister. Information will be presented to the Minister.
- A few have already met with the agriculture critic, or their MLAs, who are very supportive of the growers and what they do for the province.
- Dianne didn't think a letter would be useful right now. New farmers are the ones who are finding this most difficult and finding that their returns are much lower than expected.

MOTION: Moved by Bev Marley and Seconded by Linda Geggie: "That PAAC write to the Minister of Agriculture, with copies to local MLA's, requesting that growers be permitted to raise their prices to reflect the current cost of operation."

Councillor Smyth stated it may be prudent and beneficial to seek the support from local government first before approaching FIRB directly.

The Commission agreed and it was recommended that the four sponsoring municipalities be approached requesting their support before proceeding further.

CARRY for further Action

### Discussions re Agriculture in the Classroom:

- This was briefly discussed at the January meeting and all agreed it is an excellent programme but should be tabled until COVID restrictions are over.
- Noted there is a Farm-School Network in Victoria and a few schools are participating.
- Suggested we could start to compile a list of farms will to participate and look into any insurance issues.
- Once COVID restrictions have been removed, we can look at this in more detail.

CARRY for further discussion

## **CORRESPONDENCE – No correspondence**

## **VANCOUVER ISLAND AGRICULTURE ADAPATION GROUP – Bob Maxwell**

- Bob reported that he was unable to attend the last meeting. He did ask the Manager for an update but he hasn't received this to date.
- Emily Carmichael stated she attended the meeting on water use; the consultant selected sub-regions for the focus areas within the CRD, from the Peninsula to the Gulf Islands. She will forward her notes.
- Michael Doehnel was at the meeting also; the deficit of water in some regions was discussed, such as the Gulf Islands. The issue will be revisited in the next few months, concentrating on food production and/or horticulture areas.
- The budget is fairly small; there should be more information coming forward in May or June.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

One application has been received and another is pending. Two new members will give us a total of 9. The Terms of Reference permit up to 12.

## **ANNUAL REPORT**

Sub-Committee chairs Linda, Terry and Mike were reminded about their reports. Phil has also been asked to submit a report for last year.

Regarding the Saanich Fair, Bob Thompson urged PAAC that if they want to participate in this year's fair they remind the fair organizers accordingly.

## **AGRICULTURAL LAND USE INVENTORY**

- Further to discussions at the January meeting regarding the continued loss and increased non-farm use applications on ALR lands, Linda has been trying to locate a document that was compiled by the CRD and/or the province on the ALR.
- A contact at the CRD wanted to know why we needed this data. Apparently it provides an accurate record of water demands and usage, agricultural land use, and soil capability.
- PAAC had been interested to see if there was information available showing location of the current volume of ALR lands and how – or if – they are used, and how much has been lost.  
CARRY for further discussion

## **ALR 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION**

- Emily advised that although the ALR was introduced in 1972, it was not enacted until 1973.
- The ALC and the Ministry of Agriculture are planning a celebration for 2023.
- They are aware that PAAC would like to participate.
- No details are available at this time.
- Discussion noted this would be an opportune time to profile what is happening to ALR lands, not only on the Island, but the entire province.

**NEXT MEETING:** The next PAAC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 10, 2022 at 7:00 pm

**ADJOURNMENT:** The meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm

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Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary

**PARKING LOT (Pending Issues)**

1. T-5 slip from 2020 & 2021 further to interest on PAAC's GIC
2. Grape & Fruit Atlas for Vancouver Island
3. 50<sup>th</sup> Celebration of ALR 2023 (ALC & Ministry of Agriculture)
4. Appointment of new representative from Minister's Office
5. Additional Farm Tours with Brian Spencer for Council members (Spring 2022)
6. Agriculture in the Classroom
7. Agricultural Land Reserve Inventory
8. Rising cost of poultry operations & discussions with FIRB
9. Response from Water Commission re variances in municipal water rates