

**PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION MEETING
COMMITTEE ROOM #2 – SAANICH MUNICIPAL HALL
THURSDAY JANUARY 12, 2023 7:00 PM**

In attendance: Robin Tunnicliffe in the Chair; Anita Bull, (Zoom); Terry Michell; Jenni Michell; Larry Sluggett; Katie Underwood; Dianne Williamson; Councillors Smyth (N. Saanich), Paltiel (Central Saanich) and De Vries (Saanich) and Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary.

Guests: Megan Halstead, Regional Agrologist; Cameron Scott & Cassidy Daskalchuck, Saanich Planning; Andrea Pickard, Planner and Dale Puskas, Engineer, District of Central Saanich; Bob Maxwell

Regrets: Satnam Dheenshaw; Linda Geggie

Minutes: The November 3, 2022 Minutes were adopted as circulated.

TREASURER'S REPORT - Jenni Michell

- Jenni is now officially the Treasurer and has signing authority with Island Savings.
- Island Savings has requested signed forms officially removing past treasurers Samantha Charlton and Carol Davidson. The secretary will take care of this.
- Account balances remain relatively unchanged, with \$17,000 in a cashable GIC and \$1,586 in the chequing account.

MOTION: Moved by Dianne Williamson and Seconded by Terry Michell: “That Samantha Charlton and Carol Davidson be removed from the Island Savings records of past treasurers for PAAC.”

CARRIED

SPEAKER'S BUREAU

- No speakers for this meeting; February Jane Welton, Greater Victoria Acting Together, will be attending to discuss climate change actions.

CORRESPONDENCE – none received

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: NEW

(a) Maber Flats Flooding – Dale Puskas, Central Saanich Engineer

- Larry Sluggett stated:
- Fifteen years ago two 1600' dykes were constructed along the e/w boundary of Maber Flats and the n/s boundary of Highfield Road – an unimproved gazetted roadway that does not show up on existing survey maps.

- Central Saanich purchased 25 acres of the land in 2012 and no improvements have taken place, although some were planned.
- The original was to use the land as a water collection pond but that never went ahead.
- From a farming standpoint, the soils on Maber Flats are Class 1 but difficult to farm.
- The dykes create challenges and Maber Flats is essentially one large flood plain as they prevent the water escaping to the south. This also results in flood of surrounding residential properties.

Dale Puskas, Engineer at Central Saanich, stated:

- In 2009 Central Saanich implemented an Integrated Storm Water Management Plan, (ISWMP) which included Maber Flats as a flood plain.
- After acquiring a portion of the property, the District did nothing until 2019 when they put in the control valve on the northern portion. This was only part of the work that should have been done.
- At the end of September 2022 the District applied for a federal grant to complete the proposed improvements to manage the water properly. This is now in the final planning stages, waiting on a decision about the grant. A public engagement process with stakeholders is suggested.
- The District is open to holding an on-site meeting with stakeholders; sharing the staff report on the ISWMP, and the direction from Council in 2019 with the list of improvements that have been done.
- The northeast corner of the property has the same elevation as Graeme Creek; investigation needed to determine the flow of water between Sluggett's property and Graeme Creek as this might be what is causing the flooding.

Discussion noted the following:

- Property sits underwater for months each year.
- Crops do not grow because no air has been able to get to the soils.
- Considerable work required to remediate the soils after the water has been drained.
- The weir to the north is closed; however Dale advised that culverts are planned.
- There have been many legal challenges between neighbours and the District; staff have been slow to move forward on the project because of the number of stakeholders involved.
- Suggested a group be formed with neighbours, First Nations, and others who have a stake in the in the property, meeting a couple of times a year on site, in the late fall and before the growing season to assess the conditions.
- A first meeting should be arranged within the next couple of months.

Councillor Paltiel noted it would help Council if PAAC sent a letter of support for the project.

(b) Vertical Farming – Central Saanich Report – Andrea Pickard, C.Saanich Planning

The report considered by Council at its November 14, 2022 meeting was circulated to PAAC. Council is seeking direction with respect to addressing vertical farming structures in the Land Use Bylaw, in response to provincial legislation changes allowing local governments to regulate “controlled environment structures” within the ALR.

Andrea stated:

- Vertical farming systems intensify food production in a controlled environment and are now regulated through the ALC.
- It is considered a new type of agri-technology.
- Less land and resources are required, local food security improved in a manner that is adaptive to climate change.
- The structures can be on agricultural or industrial zoned lands. Existing spaces could be re-purposed.
- Applications for vertical farming would be considered in the same way as other applications for a permitted land use.
- The questions for PAAC to consider are:
 - (a) Should vertical farming systems be allowed ?
 - (b) Should there be any additional regulations ?
 - (c) Would there be any drainage concerns ?
 - (d) Should building be regulated based on soil type?

PAAC comments were noted as follows:

- Concerned about the structures using valuable farmland.
- Caution in using sites that flood regularly; could require large amounts of fill to prevent flooding. *Noted applicant would have to let District know about intention to use fill.*
- Having a controlled area to grow greens throughout the winter is ideal.
- Suggest structures not be located on the higher classed soils (1 and 2).
- Questioned if food prices would increase using vertical farming.
- There are advantages with this system: less land and fewer resources required; no evaporation; no damage from climate change or adverse weather conditions; protection from wildlife (geese, deer), reduced labour.
- Use caution with the visual appearance and aesthetics of any permanent structures; no block-concrete styles like the one adjacent to Michells farm seen from the Pat Bay Highway at Mt. Newton Cross Road. Maybe screening (hedges, trees) could be used.
- Height is an issue: keep in scale with greenhouses, perhaps a one level building around 10' or so.
- The population on the Island continues to grow while farms and our ability to grow local food continues to decline.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: CURRENT

a) Water update – Mike Doehnel – Not Present

Last month, Michael was re-appointed to the Saanich Peninsula Water Commission (SPWC) as the agricultural representative from PAAC. The CRD has now requested that PAAC appoint a representative to the Saanich Peninsula Waste Water Commission (SPWWC). Michael has agreed to continue to be the rep on this committee as well.

MOTION: Moved by Terry Michell and Seconded by Dianne Williamson: “That Michael Doehnel be reappointed as the agricultural representative from PAAC on the Saanich Peninsula Waste Water Commission for a two year term.”

CARRIED

b) Spring Farm Tour 2023

- Agreed tour date will be Saturday, June 10, 2023; better weather and berries in season.
- Suggested that Metchosin would be a good location; past tours have been in Saanich or the Peninsula.
- Robin offered a tour of her Sea Bluff Farm and suggested that Tom Henry's sheep farm and Bilston Lavender Farm may be good options as they are all very close.
- The drive out to Metchosin would be about 20-25 minutes but that provides good opportunity for speakers.
- Suggestions for speakers:
 - Graeme Fowler from GOMIES (now GOOSE) – or someone from CRD re geese
 - Brad Morrison
- Lunch would have to be organized.
- The Community Bus booked for the day.
- Information pamphlets prepared, with a map of farms.
- Secretary to send out "Save the Date" notices to possible participants.
- Suggestions:
 - Mayors, Councillors & Planning & Engineering staff of member municipalities;
 - CRD Board & staff members (offering opportunity to other municipalities)
 - Reporters from Black Press (Saanich News, Peninsula News, Goldstream Gazette, etc)
- As usual, no charge to participants; funding from PAAC's education account.
- PAAC members were asked to give some thought to venues, speakers and information they want to pass along to our local government, as well as attendees.

CARRY For discussion February 9 meeting

c) 50th Anniversary of ALR

- Meghan Halstead reported that the the Ministry and the ALC are working on plans for a celebration of the ALR's 50th anniversary. They are pleased that PAAC is on board to help.
- She will have more to report at the February meeting.

d) Saanich Farm Worker Housing Policy Update – Cassidy Daskalchuck & Cam Scott

Cam Scott introduced Cassidy Daskalchuck, who has been recently been hired as the Agriculture and Food Security Planner by Saanich; she will be attending PAAC meetings on a regular basis.

- He advised that Council has now officially passed the FWH Policy.
- Application info will soon be added to the Saanich website, www.saanich.ca
- Temporary Use Permits will be used, similar to the procedures used by Central Saanich.

OTHER BUSINESS

a) Vancouver Island Agriculture Adaptation Group – Bob Maxwell

Nothing to report on the Ag Adaption Group at this time.

- He noted that the recent rainfall has brought the water level at the CRD Reservoir up to normal levels for this time of year.
- Also noted that 200' deep well on a Sayward Road farm ran dry recently for the first time.

b) Vancouver Island Agri-Services Newsletter

Megan advised people can sign up for the newsletter, or send content contributions to https://agricservicebc.campayn.com/contact_list_form/signup/110236

c) Food Issues – Victoria UrbanFood Table – Katie Underwood

<https://www.victoriaurbanfoodtable.com/>

Katie is a member of this group that meet regularly to discuss food security issues. She has been asked if it would be possible to invite a member of Victoria City Council to sit in on the meetings.

The secretary advised that meetings are open to the public, so a Victoria Councillor or members of the Victoria UrbanFood Table would be welcome to attend as observers or they could bring an issue forward to be placed on the Agenda for discussion.

PAAC has talked previously about expanding its membership. Voting members on the Commission are farmers or someone who works in an agricultural-related business. Councillors are non-voting members. Expanding the membership would involve a change to the Terms of Reference and the finances.

d) Reinstate a Farmers' Institute – Katie Underwood

Katie stated she recently attended a workshop event on silage crops recently and some of the attendees were discussing the lack of a farmers' institute in the region.

- It would be beneficial to meet up with other farmers to discuss issues and opportunities, similar to what used to happen at the Farmer2Farmer workshops that were held before COVID.
- The focus could be on small-scale growers perhaps.
- It is a privilege for her to hear from long-time farmers and their thoughts and advice on today's farming operations.

Councillor Smyth thought this was a good idea, noting that he and past Chair Phil Christie had discussed the idea about having a farmers' institute. He agreed getting farmers together to share issues, ideas and knowledge would be worthwhile.

Discussion ensued and it was recommended that a small sub-committee be formed to explore the issue. CR-Fair (Linda Geggie) has the organizing capacity; the Ministry of Agriculture (Meghan Halstead) as well as some PAAC members could take part.

CARRY for further discussion

UPCOMING EVENTS/WEBINARS

- Island Agricultural Show, Cowichan, February 3 and 4, 2023. Pre-Registration required.

LATE ITEM:

Email from Guardians of Our Salish Estuaries Society (GOOSE) formerly GOMIES

- A email was received thanking PAAC for its contribution of \$4,000 last year, and requesting additional financial support from PAAC in order to keep the momentum going on the goose addling programme and to bridge the gap until the CRD's support kicks in.
- Last year, 237 nest were located and the addling prevented 1200 eggs from hatching within the CRD last spring.

Discussion ensued regarding the CRD's proposal to approve a Goose Management Strategy as an official service, and the proposed methodology to be used to determine public opposition.

- It was agreed that the Chair would write a letter to the CRD – with a copy to the Times Colonist – expressing PAAC's frustration with the survey process.
- In recent days Terry Michell, Ann Knightingale, representatives from GOMIES and Dan Ponchet have been interviewed by the media.

MOTION: Moved by Terry Michell and Seconded by Larry Sluggett: "That PAAC send additional funding to the Guardians of Our Salish Estuaries Society in the amount of \$3,000."

- As before, because most of PAAC's funds are tied up in a term deposit, the money can be provided from PAAC's Saanich account, and repaid when the term deposit matures in August, 2023.

The Motion was then Put and Carried

NEXT MEETING: The next PAAC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 9, 2023 at 7:00 pm at the Saanich Municipal Hall, Committee Room No. 2.

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting adjourned at 8.55 pm

Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary