

**PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION MEETING
COMMITTEE ROOM #2 – SAANICH MUNICIPAL HALL
THURSDAY FEBRUARY 9, 2023 7:00 PM**

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

Guests: Megan Halstead, Regional Agrologist; Cassidy Daskalchuck, Saanich Planning; Bob Maxwell; Shelly MacDonald, Haliburton Farms; Jane Welton and Gertie Josh, Greater Victoria Acting Together (Zoom); Britt Burnham and Edgar Mitchell, Central Saanich Planning, Darren Stott, Greenchain Consulting (Zoom);

Regrets: Satnam Dheenshaw; Larry Sluggett

Minutes: The January 12, 2023 Minutes were adopted as circulated.

TREASURER'S REPORT - Jenni Michell – Nothing to report

SPEAKER'S BUREAU

- Jane Welton & Gertie Josh: Greater Victoria Acting Together (GVAT) - via ZOOM

- Jane is the volunteer co-lead of the Climate Justice Team of Greater Victoria Acting Together and a member of the Climate Team's Food and Agriculture sub-committee.
- Her presentation is attached to and forms part of these minutes.

Discussion ensued and the following comments were noted:

- The GVAT group could help raise awareness of local food consumption: people may think they are supporting local agriculture but in fact buy a small percentage throughout the region.
- If a store sells one or two "local" products, often people may assume everything is local.
- We need to put support behind land access and to our young growers; getting traction or tenure on farmland is a huge challenge.
- When asked why GVAT focused on plant-based foods, Jane advised the group is a climate team; plant-based foods have the lowest greenhouse gas emissions.
- It is estimated about 30% of the Island's population make the effort to buy local.
- Providing local foods to hospitals and school lunch programmes should be explored further; purchasing agreements vary from district to district, and it was noted that the Saanich School District does not have one.
- If a farmer/grower is not GAP certified government institutions will not consider you at all. A special type of insurance is also required to sell to institutions.
- Questioned how many farmers have the capacity to grow more produce without over-extending themselves. Some farmers just grow hay; others are in the equestrian business – keeping the land green and free from development, but not producing food.
- We should have an inventory of farmers and who grows what and how much.

The Commission thanked Jane and Gertie for their presentation and asked that they keep PAAC advised of any progress and any new programmes they introduce.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: NEW

(a) Proposed Food Hub – Central Saanich – Darren Stott, Greenchain Consulting

Britt Burnham, Central Saanich Planner, advised through a grant in 2022 from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, the District was able to hire a consultant to prepare a feasibility study for a proposed food hub in Central Saanich. It is planned to reach out to other municipalities to see if they are interested.

Darren Stott gave a power-point presentation on the findings and recommendations for a food hub in Central Saanich, and noted that he also did a similar study for the District of Saanich.

- An assessment on the affordability of a larger-use processing facility was completed, considering not only food and beverage producers but restaurants as well.
- Service and resource needs were identified, including: food safety; more production infrastructure and abattoirs; a local food advocate; shared cold storage, kitchen, processing space and an on-line sales platform; specialized food processing equipment; mentorship and training; and a “local food only” retail market.
- Community benefits of a Hub include: more access to local food; improved food security; expanding local economy and agri-tourism; less food waste; improved education on the awareness and importance of local food.
- 28 enterprises have expressed an interest in a food hub for various reasons, with most being interested in food processing and storage facilities, as well as e-commerce services and wholesale distribution.
- Suggested ideal building size and location for medium size facility is about 10,000 sq.ft. with room to expand; proximity to Hwy 17; good delivery/loading access; adequate parking for commercial vehicles and visitors.
- Proposed services and facilities include: on-line ordering; marketing and brokerage services; equipment and food storage rental; processing kitchen; 3rd party rental space; education and training; shared office space; small retail store.
- An example of the layout for a 10,000 sq.ft. Building proposed 20% for cooler space, 10% for freezer space, 10% for ambient storage and 20% for a commercial kitchen as well as other designated spaces to a lesser degree.
- Start up costs total between \$500,000 and \$575,000. The highest expense is for the leasehold improvement costs (\$375,000 to \$400,000).
- Although the first couple of years would operate at a loss, it is hoped that over five years the Hub will see revenues of \$5m or more. So far, 12 people/groups have said they would invest between \$10,000 and \$20,000 in the enterprise.
- Impact on the local food economy is significant. Within five years it is expected the food hub will help increase regional food sales by almost \$3m and increase the \$287m in local food spending by more than 1%.
- Darren noted \$3 m worth of food is sold each year in Central Saanich – but it is not all local.

- Until a location is secured, you can get funding. He estimates this could be two years away. Once the location is determined then the District can move forward with the business plan and securing partners.

Darren also provided an update on the District of Saanich feasibility study:

- Research to date includes interviews, a workshop and a survey.
- Stakeholder feedback includes: challenges faced by producers and processors; desire for Indigenous organizations to improve and expand food programmes; support for hospitality businesses; food security challenges faced by non-profits due to a growing demand.
- Respondents showed a lot of interest in a variety of services, with 11 food enterprises indicating they are ready to use the facility 6 days or more per year.
- Current recommendations for the food hub include: an on-line sales platform; a local food only retail store; a commercial kitchen and processing facility; business development services.

In response to questions from the Commission, Darren advised as follows:

- There is currently a food hub at Haliburton Farm in Saanich and one in Esquimalt.
- The survey asked farmers what kind of services and infrastructure would be useful to help with their business.
- Being aware of the high labour and land costs, the farmers were interested in the type of facilities, resources and services that could help them grow and sustain their businesses.
- In terms of financing for the facility, one of the options is to look at grants.
- Having an abattoir was brought up many times and it is something the District of Central Saanich needs to look at further. It would be challenge having this as part of the food hub, but can be considered.
- He did a feasibility study with SIPP for an abattoir and meat processing facility in the region, as well as a business model.
- Britt advised that a letter has been sent to North Saanich last week regarding the food hub and should be on their agenda next week.
- Darren asked members to advise Central Saanich if they thought of any suitable locations for a Hub. Longview Farms, the Saanichton Fairgrounds and Camosun College (Saanich) are some good locations that could work and meet the specifications.

PAAC thanked Darren for his presentation. It was noted that local municipalities should combine forces to get the food hub up and running. PAAC also noted they had trouble with the stated \$3 m spent on food just in Central Saanich and wondered if the number was correct.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: CURRENT

a) Water update – Mike Doehnel – Not Present

b) Spring Farm Tour 2023

- It has been agreed to visit 3 farms in Metchosin: Bilston Lavender Farm, Sea Bluff Farm (mostly vegetables) and Still Meadow Farm (sheep and pigs).
- **Bilston Farm** has regular tours and demonstrations; they offer refreshments for purchase and other seasonal offerings. All products made on site and the farm store will be open with samples of lavender sprays and soaps, etc.

- In June the lavender fields will be in bloom and make a great backdrop for photos.
- It is a short distance to **Sea Bluff Farm** where we will have lunch, made from locally sourced food, such as salads and sausage from Green Meadows Farm. Local strawberries will hopefully be ripe.
- **Still Meadow Farm** – again a short distance from Sea Bluff – operated by Tom Henry, has pigs and sheep.
- Linda Geggie will look into booking the community bus.
- Suggested a couple of pick up spots – one at Michells and another in Saanich, perhaps Tillicum Mall as it is easy access from there to the Island Highway.
- The bus trip from the Mall to Bilston Farm should take about 20 – 25 minutes, sufficient time to have have one or two speakers and share information.
- Timing: perhaps a 9:30 am pickup at Michells, 9:50 ish at Tillicum Mall; 10:30 arrival at Bilston. Good to finish the tour by 3pm.
- Suggestions for speakers were someone from PAAC (Max and or Mike?) to talk about farming in general or water issues; someone from the CRD (Noah Brotman) to talk about the Food and Agriculture Study; Jody Watson (CRD) re Goose Management Programme.
- Isobel to send out a “Save the Date” notice to member municipalities.
- Suggested to keep the invites to Mayors, Councillors and staff of member municipalities initially and then depending on the numbers expand to other municipalities who may be interested. All PAAC members are invited to attend.
- In the past MLAs and MPs have also been invited.
- Jane Welton and a guest from the Greater Victoria Acting Together for Climate Change group were invited.
- The bus has a capacity of about 50 people, but it was suggested to keep the numbers to around 40 if possible.
- Other things to consider:
 - Printed information/brochures
 - Map and info on each farm.
 - Speakers and topics for the bus – both in and out journeys
 - Perhaps speak to the 50th anniversary of the ALR
 - Portable sound system for speakers
 - Free event for attendees; PAAC will cover rental of bus and cost of lunch.
 - Bilston Farm had suggested participants could be given a ticket to purchase a refreshment and PAAC would be billed accordingly; is this something to consider?
 - Timing to the different farms and return to Tillicum Mall and Michells to be discussed.

CARRY for further discussion

c) 50th Anniversary of ALR

Megan had nothing to report at this time but the ALC is aware that PAAC would like to be involved in any organized celebrations.

d) Consideration of Reinstatement of a Farmers' Institute (Katie Underwood – Jan/2023)

Discussion ensued:

- Meghan suggested that PAAC could form a sub-committee to work in the same way that the Farmers' Institute did many years ago. She noted that by forming an institute, grants would be available to assist with workshop expenses.

- Salt Spring Island, Pender Island, Cowichan Valley and Metchosin have Farmers' Institutes. The one on the Peninsula disbanded in the 1980s.
- The Cowichan Valley group have considerable funds plus they own a lot of equipment. They charge annual fees and make a profit, and hold auctions to sell equipment.
- Katie offered to do some research and report back.

CARRY to the March Meeting

CORRESPONDENCE

- a) Letter from Chair to CRD re methodology for Goose Management Survey responses; letter printed in the Times Colonist.
- b) Letter to Central Saanich encouraging the District to follow through with Maber Flats improvements.
- c) Letter to Central Saanich providing PAAC comments on the vertical farming proposal.

OTHER BUSINESS

- a) **Vancouver Island Agriculture Adaptation Group – Bob Maxwell** – nothing to report
Meghan noted there was a wrap-up meeting for the winter vegetable control project. The group has also been doing research into various cover crops from Comox to the Cowichan Valley.
- b) **Vancouver Island Agri-Services Newsletter (Meghan) – for information**
https://agricservicebc.campayn.com/contact_list_form/signup/110236
- c) **Island Agricultural Show – Cowichan Valley – February 3 & 4, 2023**
Noted this was a well-attended event.

PACC ANNUAL REPORT 2022

- Members were reminded about providing input for the 2022 PAAC Annual Report, **BY MARCH 1, 2023**.
- Photographs of agriculture in the region would also be welcome. The secretary noted that since past chair Phil Christie left, and also due to COVID, there has been no replacement for the Agricultural Land Base. Agreed this is an important aspect of the annual report. Cassidy and Meghan offered to check out statistics re Agricultural Land Base and report back.

UPCOMING EVENTS/WEBINARS

Spring Farm Tour – Saturday, June 10, 2023

NEXT MEETING: The next PAAC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 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