

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

In attendance: Robin Tunnicliffe in the Chair; Linda Geggie (Zoom); Anita Bull; Jenni Michell; Larry Sluggett (Zoom); 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; Mike Doehnel (Zoom); Noah Brotman, CRD

Regrets: Satnam Dheenshaw; Terry Michell, Linda Geggie

Minutes: The February 9, 2023 Minutes were adopted as circulated.

TREASURER'S REPORT - Jenni Michell – Nothing to report

SPEAKER'S BUREAU

- Noah Brotman from the CRD Regional Planning Department is working on the Foodlands Land Access initiative. Information will eventually shared with PAAC. He hopes to come back to a future meeting to make a presentation.
- Jody Watson from the CRD will attend the April meeting to give an update on the Goose Management Strategy, which is in the process of being officially implemented at the CRD.

CORRESPONDENCE

a) 4251 Blenkinsop Road: Application for non-farm use on ALR lands

This application was previously discussed at the February 10, 2022 meeting. The applicant has obtained a soil analysis report, as requested, which notes the area of the property in question is not arable and has no value to agricultural production.

- While the specific site may not have arable land, it could support greenhouses, or vertical farming (which was discussed at PAAC's January 12, 2023 meeting)
- Noted the applicant wants to use the existing barns as rental spaces for RVs.
- The barns could be used for agricultural use rather than vehicle storage.
- PAAC's mandate is to support farming and protect food security – and the proposed use of the barns has nothing to do with agriculture.
- Saanich and Central Saanich seem to have a number of non-farm use applications on ALR lands.
- Apparently, once you have received farm status, the BC Assessment Authority do not do regular checks on the use. Noted that according to BCAA, Saanich alone has over 500 farms registered. This is surprising that there are that many “working farms” in Saanich.
- Agreed that storage may be necessary for heavy farm machinery – but not for recreational vehicles.

MOTION: Moved by Anita Bull and Seconded by Dianne Williamson: “That PAAC advise the Planning Department they do not support the application for non-farm use at 4251 Blenkinsop Road. There are other options that support agriculture, such as vertical farming, greenhouses or container farming if the soils are not arable.”

CARRIED

b) 4400 Blenkinsop Road – Application for non-farm use on ALR Lands

A soil analysis was completed, indicating the soil around the barn yard area is not arable and has no value for agricultural production. The owner wishes to use the former poultry barns for rental storage of heavy vehicles.

The situation is identical to the application above for 4251 Blenkinsop, noted above.

MOTION: Moved by Anita Bull and Seconded by Dianne Williamson: “That PAAC advise the Planning Department they do not support the application for non-farm use at 4400 Blenkinsop Road. There are other options, such as vertical farming, greenhouses or container farming which support agriculture if the soils are not arable.”

CARRIED

c) 536 Brookleigh Road – Application for removal of fill for pool & accessory building on ALR land

- Noted there is not much farming taking place on this farmland; apparently the owners don't have farm status, and a home base business is registered to one of the two homes on the property.
- Recognized that PAAC is just an advisory committee, but we have to follow our mandate to support, protect and sustain farming on ALR lands.
- Noted this is a good example of farmland being used as an estate, while there are young farmers who cannot afford to buy and can't find land to lease or have some kind of agreement to allow them to establish a home and farm the land.
- Adding a pool and cabana in addition to the what is there now just makes this property less affordable for farmers in the future.

MOTION: Moved by Anita Bull and Seconded by Dianne Williamson: “That the application not be support by PAAC as it does not meet our mandate to support, protect and sustain farming on ALR lands.”

CARRIED

d) Report on Size and Location of homes on A-zoned lands – District of Saanich

- Report was distributed to members. PAAC's advice was requested regarding regulating the size and location of residential properties on A-zones and whether to align the regulations with the recent ALR/ALC changes. The report has not been considered by Council at this time.
- The Planner stated that Saanich is looking at aligning its regulations for A-1 zones with the recent changes introduced by the ALC for ALR lands to regulate the maximum house size, and also considering residential footprint and setback requirements.
- Staff will bring forward options for residential foot prints based on other jurisdictions in BC and see if Council will support them.

- Current site coverage for lots under 2000 sq.m is 40%; lots over this size have no limit.
- Councillor DeVries stated that in Richmond some 400 m² or larger homes have been built – although he noted A-1 lots on the lower mainland are bigger than those in Saanich so the maximum house size and lot coverage should be amended accordingly.

General discussion noted the following:

- Setbacks and location should take into consideration the topography and sun angles on a case by case basis as farmers will want to have as much sunlight as possible.
- 400 m² or more for a house on smaller A-1 lots is too large.
- Saanich is almost built-out so in most cases it will involve the existing older homes being demolished to make way for a new home; and siting should take into consideration how to maximize farming on the site.
- What about A zones not within the ALR? What about having a suite in the home?
- Noted that currently in Saanich if the property is outside the urban containment boundary suites are not allowed. Would this be allowed in the A-1 zones?
- PAAC had discussed this issue previously a few years ago; the secretary will search for the information.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: NEW

a) Proposed Farmers' Institute on the Peninsula (Katie Underwood)

- Katie recently went to Comox to the Mid-Island Farmers' Conference; it has been a long time since growers have come together in person and it was a good opportunity to connect.
- She understands that the Comox Valley has a farmers' institute, as well as Salt Spring Island and the mid-Island. We can learn from them. In talking with local growers, there is a definite interest in reinstating a South Island Farmers' Institute.
- This would provide an opportunity for farmers to learn from other farmers, or have access to specialized farm equipment.
- This would be very helpful to smaller farmers and growers who perhaps cannot afford to make large purchases or are just starting out and could use some help with farming questions.
- She does not want this to be just for smaller growers however.
- It is acknowledged that the “larger” growers on Island have smaller acreages than growers throughout the rest of Canada.
- One of the purposes for initiating a South Island Farmers' Institute is so we can learn from other farmers, hold workshops, invite speakers, and move towards having a cohesive group with a stronger voice within the community.
- She asked if anyone had suggestions or ideas to let her know.
- A mid to late April time frame was proposed, Sunday afternoon, 1-4 pm.
- A few locations were suggested, but agreed the Saanich Fairgrounds would be a preferred spot. Ample parking; could be a reduction in the rental rate. Central location for farmers.
- Expenses would include cost for the venue, honorariums for speakers, travel costs, refreshments, equipment rental (PA system).
- Possible funding sources: PAAC and the Ministry of Agriculture.
- Katie will continue to pursue speakers, locations, extend invites etc., and reach out for help when needed.

CARRY forward to April meeting for final plans

b) Saanich Fair – September 2nd to 4th, 2023

- Theme this year is “Jammin' at the Fair” and will feature preserved foods.
- Other than perhaps using the PAAC space to promote the South Island Farmers' Institute (if it is successful) there was no discussion about PAAC setting up a display as in past years.
- Last year's setup seemed to work well, and some members were on hand to help.

CARRY to April meeting for final decision

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: CURRENT

a) Water update – Mike Doehnel – Via Zoom

- The Sooke Reservoir is at 97% storage capacity.
- The Regional Water Supply Commission is still looking at agricultural water rates; a consultant has been engaged. He expects to hear more information about this soon.
- Three new commissioners have been hired for the NAC??? to look after agricultural interests.

The Chair noted CRD officials came to her farm to make sure they had back flow preventers on both their residential and farm water lines. She was told to install 4 back flow preventers at a cost of \$200 each, and also they have to them serviced every year – cost of \$100.

b) Spring Farm Tour 2023

MOTION: Moved by Jenni Michell and Seconded by Katie Underwood: “That PAAC support the cost of \$610 for the Community Bus for the June 10 bus tour.”

CARRIED

- Recommended that we obtain a portable PA system. Long and McQuad was suggested
- The 3 farms selected for the tour are all in Metchosin, a short distance from each other:
 1. Bilston Lavender Farm – Lavender based refreshments available for purchase
 2. Sea Bluff Farm – lunch spot as well as tour
 3. Still Meadows Farm (Sheep)
- PAAC will arrange for each participant to have a free refreshment at Bilston Farm.
- Suggest contacting Katie Engqvist with the Black Press and/or Carla Wilson of the TC for some press coverage; perhaps extend invite for them to join the tour.
- Noted this is the 50th anniversary of the ALR: perhaps info can be prepared as a handout
- Food & refreshments:
 - Robin had prepared approximate costs for the food – final tally depends on attendance.
 - She has a covered area where some people can sit; not room for everyone underneath however.
 - Chairs - Maybe borrow or rent? She has plates and cutlery. Would we need another portable canopy – like at Saanich Fair?
 - Sea Bluff can prepare 4 salads: greens, bean salad, potato and one with radish and kohlrabi.
 - Sausage from Still Meadow Farms(BBQ)
 - Byron Fry has a bakery, uses Metchosin wheat and could provide buns and cookies.
 - Local beer (Mike D), nettle tea, lemonade

- Bus capacity is 56; unsure of attendance, but expect that all Metchosin Councillors and the Mayor would attend as the events are all in Metchosin (no need to ride in bus).
- Propose two pickup spots: Michells at 9:30 and one in Saanich – Royal Oak area or Tillicum; to be determined.
- Tour to start at Bilston at 10:30 am and end at Still Meadow at 2:30 pm for return to Michells around 3pm.
- Save the Date info has been sent. A number of positive responses received – including Elizabeth May.
- Final invites, with details of the tour and a map to be prepared. Suggest send out last week in May.
- Handouts for the bus – depending on who is speaking and on what topic to be arranged.

c) 50th Anniversary of ALR – Megan Halstead

- There are plans underway at the ALC. The actual anniversary is April 18.
- The ALC was happy to hear that PAAC was asking about any celebrations.

OTHER BUSINESS

a) Vancouver Island Agriculture Adaptation Group – Bob Maxwell – nothing to report

b) Vancouver Island AgriService Newsletter – Meghan Halstead

- This is a community bulletin province-wide and includes events happening on the Island, upcoming events, etc. The next issue is April 1st.

PACC ANNUAL REPORT 2022

- Still waiting for sub-committee reports; reminders have been sent.
- Hope to have report completed by the end of March and distributed to Councils.
- Could be handout on the bus tour.

UPCOMING EVENTS/WEBINARS

- Spring Farm Tour – Saturday, June 10, 2023

NEXT MEETING: The next PAAC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 13, 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