

**PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION MEETING
COMMITTEE ROOM #2 – SAANICH MUNICIPAL HALL
THURSDAY NOVEMBER 16, 2023 7:00 PM**

In attendance: Robin Tunnicliffe in the Chair; Anita Bull; Terry Micell; Larry Sluggett; Katie Underwood; Dianne Williamson; Councillor Paltiel (C. Saanich) and Councillor Marshall (N.Saanich via ZOOM) and Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary.

Guests: Megan Halstead, Regional Agrologist (by ZOOM); Cassidy Daskalchuck, Saanich Planning; Noah Broatman, CRD; Michael Doehnel; Shellie MacDonald, Haliburton Farms; Barry McLean; Kathleen Zimmerman and David Listhaegne, Stage Restaurant.

Regrets: Jenni Michell; Linda Geggie

Minutes: The Minutes of October 12, 2023 were adopted as circulated.

North Saanich Councillor Kristine Marshall was welcomed to the Commission via ZOOM, and introductions were made.

CHAIR'S REPORT – Robin Tunnicliffe

Members may be aware that a request was put forward to the member municipalities by Central Saanich to support a governance review for PAAC. These reviews are intended for good governance and administration. It is important that there is not speculation on the reason for the review. Member municipalities will consider the request from the District of Central Saanich and we will wait to hear the outcome. Our meetings will continue with our existing appointment members in the meantime.

With all the focus this month on governance, I've been thinking about how we can do a better job with PAAC. Through informal conversations with most of the PAAC members, we're all thinking about how we can be more effective, accountable, transparent and inclusive. This is all big picture thinking and should be a direction for next year.

But for now, the low hanging fruit is to close the loop on communication with the different councils. We have our committed councilors who attend our meetings. We can better include them by putting them front and centre each month at our meetings to hear back from them about how our feedback was received at their council meetings. What was the outcome from each recommendation that we put forth and what were the friction points. Also, they can be given some time to tell us about up and coming agriculture issues in their communities.

I look forward to looking at our processes more closely over the next few months so that we can do the best job possible for our member municipalities and for the agricultural sector.

TREASURER'S REPORT - Jenni Michell – not present

SPEAKER'S BUREAU:

David Listhaegne, Stage Restaurant & Wine Bar in Fernwood:

- He has no difficulty acquiring fresh locally grown vegetables for his restaurant, but when it comes to sourcing and purchasing meat that is locally raised it's a different story.
- He is hoping that PAAC will be able to help with this.
- He understands there have been some problems with a lack of abattoirs, although there are apparently some mobile units for chickens.
- One of the problems when purchasing from a store is they can't get a whole chicken for example, with the feet and head.

PAAC noted:

- Still Meadow Farm in Metchosin raises pigs and lambs and they work in partnership with Parry Bay Sheep Farm, who owns an abattoir.
- A couple of bakeries in the Metchosin area have retail stores that sell local meat from noon till 4:00 pm on Saturdays. Everything is wrapped, labelled and in good supply.
- Still Meadow farm would like to sell more of their meat.
- Regarding getting a “whole” chicken, farmers are not able to do this because according to the Canadian Food & Inspection Agency (CFIA) it would only be for the purchaser's consumption – not for a restaurant. Perhaps such purchases can be sourced at a specialty establishment or mainland processors. Suggested he try Kildara Farm in North Saanich.

Meghan noted the Ministry has an interactive map showing all the abattoirs, and what they are licensed for – ie: poultry or four legged animals. They have to be kept separate to avoid cross-contamination and for food safety. There have been recent licensing changes which make things more accessible and so there are more abattoirs now than in the last few years. Locally there are abattoirs in the Cowichan area and Salt Spring Island. Unfortunately there is no “list” available, but she can provide some information to David that will be helpful.

Terry Michell noted that he sells beef at his retail farm market that has been raised on his farm. He suggested David call him and he can connect him with some other producers as well.

South Island Food Hub: Linda Geggie not present

Investment Agriculture Fund: Arzeena Amir unable to attend

CORRESPONDENCE:

- Letter from North Saanich confirming the appointment of Kristine Marshall as the Council representative on PAAC, with Councillor Sanjiv Shrivastava as the alternate.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: CURRENT

a) Water update – Mike Doehnel

- He attended a meeting of the Saanich Peninsula Waste Water Commission and the only agenda item was a controversial In Camera issue and in the end there was no meeting held.
- The reservoir in Sooke was at its lowest level in a long time; it will be carefully watched over the next few months as we are in a drought situation.

- b) **South Island Farmers' Institute – Katie Underwood & Shellie McDonald**
- Katie stated at a recent meeting of the South Island Farmers' Institute (SIFI) Larry Sluggett and Mike Doehnel were guest speakers.
 - Larry spoke to the challenges farmers are facing and the family history on his farm. She noted the challenges and frustrations experienced by him were similar to the ones she and other farmers face on a daily basis.
 - People attending the meeting stayed afterwards to network and talk to the speakers.
 - At the Organic BC Conference, the idea of a “Sustainers Series” was well received and she is looking forward to hosting monthly meetings. Everyone is welcome to attend.
 - Some farmers need help with the business side of farming and she would like to secure assistance for those who need it. Shellie has made a funding request for this to the Knowledge & Technology Transfer Programme through the Ministry of Agriculture.

Larry Sluggett stated:

- One of the biggest problems faced by farmers is the lack of new farmers or passing the farm on to the next generation. None of his kids want to take over the farm.
- Agriculture needs to be brought into the future.
- The existing land-matching programme is a challenge and has to be dealt with.

Regarding the **Farmer2Farmer workshop on February 15, 2024**, Katie stated:

- historically this has been an exceptional networking opportunity for farmers, bridging the gap between established and new farmers, and providing educational opportunities.
- The SIFI has booked space at the Saanich Fairgrounds and she asked if PAAC would be willing to provide financial support towards the rental of the space, at least to cover the deposit until other funds can be raised. She noted that PAAC has supported this workshop in the past.
- Entry fees will be charged to participants (undecided, but around the \$50 - \$65 range).
- Funds will also be needed to provide honorariums for speakers as well as refreshments.
- Groups and organizations will be approached to sponsor the event.

MOTION: Moved by Anita Bull and Seconded by Dianne Williamson: “That PAAC provide the deposit for the rental of the hall at the Saanich Fairgrounds for the February 2024 Farmer2Farmer Workshop in the amount of \$1,442.”

CARRIED

Katie was asked to provide a request in writing and it will be processed through Saanich accounting, with the cheque sent directly to the North and South Saanich Agricultural Society.

Metchosin Agricultural Plan:

- Robin noted that Metchosin is currently reviewing its Agricultural Area Plan.
- This is a big project for a small municipality that doesn't have the capacity to implement the plan without volunteers. A planner has been hired, Lorne Smith.
- She sits on the the Agricultural Advisory Committee and they are spending many hours reviewing data. It is unlikely they will apply for grants or fund raising. We do need another entity to assist, and she thought this could be beneficial for the SIFI to work with Metchosin.
- Stats Canada has no data for Metchosin; we get information through the Juan de Fuca Electoral Area.

- It was noted that an area has to have a certain number of farms (using postal codes) in order for data to be collected and released.
- The CRD assist with data collection for Stats Canada.

c) CRD GOOSE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME – No update available from CRD

- Robin noted that Metchosin has serious problems with flocks of Snow Geese. Noah advised that the CRD has hired someone to manage the problem; he will find out the name and pass along to Robin. There are 3 species of geese in the area: Canada Geese, White Fronted Geese and Snow Geese.
- Larry Sluggett reported that 2 acres of corn at a cost of approx. \$40,000 was destroyed by geese this past summer.
- Discussion noted that since PAAC was advised that the CRD had introduced the Goose Management Programme as a service of the Regional District, no new data has been received, including information on the egg addling programmes.
- Noted that we receive information from GOMIES, who is working with the CRD locating “hot spots” and doing egg addling.
- Suggested the CRD may be keeping things under the radar to avoid alarming the public.

PAAC requested that the secretary contact Jody Watson at the CRD for an update – either in writing, or attendance at the January meeting.

d) CRD FOODLANDS ACCESS PROGRAMME – Noah Broatman

- This programme was discussed at the last CRD Board Meeting and received a good support.
- Feedback will now be sought from the municipalities, a draft bylaw prepared and a vote will take place in February, 2024.
- The property on Bear Hill has been selected; the CRD are working through the legalities and developing a concept plan to support land matches to encourage new or young farmers.

e) CENTRAL SAANICH QUESTIONNAIRE RE HOUSING ON FARMLAND

- In answer to a question from PAAC if there was any information about this questionnaire, Councillor Paltiel stated:
 - The plan is to update the Zoning Bylaw for rural and agricultural zones, as well as ALR properties, and to bring all the properties in line with the new ALC regulations to allow second dwellings on a property.
 - For instance, do we allow a secondary suite, or a third home on a property?
 - According to the Land Use Bylaw currently 900 sq.ft. Is the maximum size for a second dwelling.
 - Some of the other questions are should additional dwellings be allowed on every ALR property or should there be a minimum standard?
 - Some people have raised concerns about secondary units or suites being used for long-term rental as opposed to just for farm worker housing use.
 - The questionnaire will come to Council for review and there will be an opportunity for public participation.
 - We are talking about approximately 600 properties that could be affected by the changes.

- A copy of the questionnaire was sent to PAAC. It is a public survey and there is opportunity for PAAC to participate and provide feedback.
 - He understands that other municipalities are looking at this in their own way. Central Saanich is one of the first to do the public survey. The agriculture community is asking us to allow flexibility to allow for a second dwelling.
 - Each application will be vetted by the municipality and the ALC, and looked at on a case by case basis on its own merits.
 - There are A-1 zoned properties who claim farm tax but are not necessarily legitimate farmers and this needs to be reviewed in terms of property size and revenue.
- PAAC discussion noted that Farm Worker Accommodations have been requested for many years. Most farmers who have an 800 or 900 sq.ft second dwelling on the property and use it for the next generation to live in find it too small. The housing crisis in the region should be considered. Perhaps consideration should be given to a speculation tax for people who buy farmland and don't farm it – it would help to reduce the price of farmland.

MOTION: Moved by Terry Michell and Seconded by Katie Underwood: “That PAAC request a planner from Central Saanich to attend a meeting to discuss the options in the survey so that PAAC can provide constructive feedback.”

CARRIED

f) Education – Linda Geggie – not present

OTHER BUSINESS

a) Vancouver Island Agriculture Adaptation Group – Bob Maxwell – not present

b) Vancouver Island AgriService Newsletter – Meghan Halstead

- Link to sign up: https://agriservicebc.campayn.com/contact_list_form/signup/110236

Meghan stated:

- The next edition of the newsletter will be January.
- The Planning team at the Ministry has been working on a biennial Planning Commission Workshop, which hasn't been held since 2021. We are hoping for early February 2024. People can attend in person or virtually.
- Staff are also working on agricultural irrigation workshops. Some of the topics that could be covered include water supply on the Island, drought conditions, water management, and climate change. More information on this after April 1st.

c) North Saanich Update – Councillor Marshall

- Councillor Marshall stated that North Saanich will also be conducting an agriculture and housing survey, similar to the one Central Saanich is doing.
- The District is also looking at Farm Worker Accommodations.
- She encouraged members to reach out to her if they have any questions.

UPCOMING EVENTS/WEBINARS

- Farmer2Farmer – Saanich Fairgrounds – February, 2024
- Island Agriculture Show – Cowichan Exhibition Grounds – February 2 and 3, 2024

NEXT MEETING: The next PAAC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, January 11, 2024 in Committee Room #2 at the Saanich Municipal Hall.

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting adjourned at 8:45 pm

Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary