

MINUTES
ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL AREAS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Held at Saanich Municipal Hall, Committee Room No. 2
January 28, 2014 at 5:15 p.m.

Present: Chair: Councillor D. Murdock

Members: Kevin Brown, Jude Coates, Harry Drage, Al-Nashir Charania,
Mary Haig-Brown, Hal Gibbard, Roberta Hesselgrave, Marie Vander
Heiden

Staff: Sharon Hvozdzanski, Director of Planning; Adriane Pollard, Environmental
Services Manager; Cory Manton, Urban Forestry, Horticulture and Natural
Areas Manager; Elizabeth van den Hengel, Committee Clerk

Guests: Linda Geggie, CR-FAIR; Natalie Chambers, Madrona Farms; Beverly
Hickey

MINUTES

MOVED by M. Haig-Brown and Seconded by H. Gibbard: “That the Minutes of the Environment and Natural Areas Advisory Committee meeting held November 26, 2013 be adopted as circulated.”

CARRIED

REGULAR MEETING SCHEDULE

The Committee will continue to meet the fourth Tuesday of every month from 5:15 – 7:15 pm, with the exception of July, August and December.

FARMLAND PROTECTION AND VIABILITY IN SAANICH

The chair introduced Linda Geggie, Coordinator for the Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable (CR-FAIR) and Natalie Chambers, Farmer, Madrona Farms. Ms. Geggie presented the Committee with challenges and opportunities surrounding farmland and farming in Saanich. The following was noted:

- Farmland is disappearing and becoming inaccessible to farmers due to the high price of land caused by population growth and urban pressures.
- Canada failed the United Nations Food Security Test in 2013. Residents of BC are the heaviest users of food banks in Canada.
- Working to build local integrated food system. Currently in Saanich less than 10% of food in stores is “local”.
- There is a global movement to re-localize food supplies.
- Watershed protection is afforded to our water supply; a similar protection should be created to protect farmland.
- Currently the primary tool for farmland conservation remains the provincially mandated and managed Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR).

- The future of the ALR and its ability to keep farmland accessible and in production is in question.
- Saanich has initiated a number of local initiatives that demonstrate a commitment to farmland conservation and local food security.
- Due to heavy competition for land in our region, current public policy and land use planning tools are inadequate to address the challenge of our disappearing farmland.
- The current Strategic Plan sets targets for increasing the amount of farmland by 5%, increasing vegetable gardens and poultry production by 66% and having allotment gardens in each of the local areas.
- The District of Saanich relies on the Peninsula Agriculture Strategy and the Peninsula Agriculture Commission (PAC) to guide its decisions around agriculture.
- Recently the PAC has identified the challenges of disappearing farmland and farmers and a range of strategies to support new entrants such as land trusts and municipally supported agriculture as ways to support the viability of the agriculture sector.
- Farmland Conservation and Land Banks:
 - Farmland is removed from the speculative real estate market and put into a “land bank” made available to farmers at affordable rates;
 - Removal of farmland is typically done through the gifting or purchasing of farmland which then transfers the ownership to the municipality or to a third party entity (land trusts, cooperatives, non-profit societies) with a mandate to conserve farmland;
 - Placing of restrictions (covenants and easements) on the land that preclude its use for any activity other than agricultural production;
 - Making protected land available to farmers at affordable rates is typically achieved by long-term leases which are priced to the land’s “agricultural value”; and
 - Often the land is used for farm incubators to support new farm start-ups, as community teaching and learning sites and community gardens.
- Land within a Saanich Farmland Bank could be held publicly, privately, by a land trust, by a society, or by a land cooperative.
- The management of the banked farm land could be done by a government, community organization, land trust or cooperative.
- Activities facilitated by the municipality could include:
 - Purchasing farmland and leasing it long-term to farmers; or for food producing activities;
 - Registering covenants on farmland by private owners;
 - Purchasing farmland and decreasing its market value by registering covenants and other charges on title;
 - Facilitating the purchase of farmland or the registration of covenants by municipalities; and
 - Undertaking farmland conservation and public education activities.
- A farmland program in Saanich is needed because the municipality is losing farmland to development pressures and retiring farmers. Over the next decade it is estimated that Saanich will lose 50% of its farmers to retirement.
- There are many ways that a Regional Farmland Conservation and Land Bank Program could be funded:
 - Gifting of land through bequests and donations
 - Agriculture Levy
 - Development Fees and Amenities
 - Fundraising campaigns and events
 - Grants
 - Sponsorship
 - Shared cost scenarios

- Program and lease revenues
- Expand the CRD Parks Acquisition Fund to include farmland

Committee discussion occurred and the following was noted:

- A conversation with our regional partners needs to occur to help determine the level of regional support/involvement.
- Concern was raised about local farmers competing with inexpensive imported foods.
- Long term leases difficult to obtain on private land.
- Soil conservation aspects of a potential Land Trust should be emphasized.
- Some post secondary institutions on Vancouver Island are offering agriculture based programs.

MOTION: Moved by M. Haig-Brown and seconded by J. Coates: "That the Environment and Natural Areas Advisory Committee recommends to Council that they request Planning staff undertake a preliminary exploration of possible partnerships with other regional stakeholders; and draft potential frameworks for the development of a Farmland Trust for Council's consideration."

CARRIED

SAANICH ENVIRONMENTAL AWARD GUIDELINES

The Manager of Environmental Services presented the Committee with the revised guidelines for Saanich's Environmental Awards and the following was noted:

- Two changes were made to the "Award Eligibility" criteria:
 - The ENA can commend Municipal staff for their on the job efforts by informing their Director and/or Human Resources
 - Nominations must be signed in ink or by personal declaration on-line and must be submitted before the dead line
- A brief explanation of each of the evaluation criteria will be provided.
- The nomination form should have space to respond to evaluation criteria.
- The nomination form should encourage letters of reference.
- The Committee may consider public information not presented in the nomination
- The ENA may consider nominations in award categories not originally applied for.
- The ENA has the right to submit group nominations until the selection process is over.

The Committee discussed the revised guidelines and consensus was that the changes are correct.

ENVIRONMENTAL BILL OF RIGHTS

Ms. J. Coates will present at the February ENA meeting.

UPDATES:

Agriculture Land Reserve:

The Chair informed the Committee that a Motion from Council and letters in support of the Agricultural Land Reserve has been forwarded to the Ministry of Agriculture and to the Ministry of Core Review.

Noxious Weeds Bylaw Revision:

The Manager of Environmental Services updated the committee on the progress of the revisions to the Noxious Weeds Bylaw. Many public surveys have been returned with supportive comments.

Integrated Pest Management:

The Manager of Environmental Services reviewed comments the committee made for the group submission to the Ministry of the Environment.

Oil Tanks:

The Chair provided an overview of the current status of the home heating oil storage tank review. The following was noted:

- The Saanich Fire Department is responsible for administering the “Oil Burning Equipment and Flammable Liquid and Combustible Liquid Fuel Tank Bylaw”. This bylaw was last reviewed in 2001. Currently the Fire Department and Municipal Solicitor are reviewing the bylaw.
- Once the review is complete recommended changes to the bylaw will be forwarded to Council for approval and bylaw revision.
- Examination of historical records for oil tank installations and removals by staff has allowed for the identification of approximately 20 properties that maybe at risk of having an improperly decommission underground oil storage tank.
- A letter informing the approximately 20 at risk property owners will be sent out.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:25 p.m.

NEXT MEETING

Next meeting is Tuesday, February 25, 2014.

Saanich Councillor Murdock, Chair

I hereby certify these Minutes are accurate.

Committee Secretary