



**MINUTES OF THE
PENINSULA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION**
Committee Room No. 2, Saanich Municipal Hall
THURSDAY, MARCH 12, 2015 AT 7:30 PM

Present: Bob Maxwell in the Chair; Samantha Charlton; Phil Christie; Bernadette Greene; Kim Lonsdale; Bev Marley; Jack Mar; Dianne Williamson; Councillors Derman (Saanich); Graham (C. Saanich); McLennan (Sidney) and Thornbrugh (N.Saanich). Also present was Rob Kline, Ministry of Agriculture; and Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Clerk.

Guests: Ray Baker

Regrets: Mary Alice Johnson, Tom Henry, Nikki Tate-Stratton, Linda Geggie, Terry Michell

Minutes: Moved by Kim Lonsdale and Seconded by Bernadette Greene: "That the Minutes of February 12, 2015 be adopted as circulated.

CARRIED

Agenda: The Agenda was approved as circulated.

TREASURER'S REPORT – Samantha Charlton

Nothing to report; still to arrange for Samantha's signature to be added to the accounts. Bev and Samantha to arrange.

SPEAKER'S BUREAU: No Speakers for this meeting

Bernadette Greene stated:

- Stacey Toews spoke at the Farmer2Farmer conference and she thought it would be interesting for PAAC members to tour the Level Ground facility on Keating Cross Road and listen to Stacey talk about the programme.
- We could then carry on with our regular meeting at the Keating Cross Road facility.

Members agreed. The April 9 meeting will commence at 7:00 a.m. to allow time for a tour of the Level Ground facility. It is located at 1970 Keating X Road (Unit B) next to Buckerfields.

CORRESPONDENCE – none received

BUSINESS ARISING FROM FEBRUARY 12, 2015 MINUTES:

Attendance at upcoming Central Saanich Council or Committee meeting by PAAC Chair and/or members:

- Councillor Graham raised this issue at the last meeting; the secretary contacted Central Saanich administration but has not heard back yet as to a preferred date. She will contact the municipality again.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – CURRENT

a) Goose Management Strategy (Bev/Rob)

- Bev advised about 14 people attended the February 28 workshop, a disappointing turnout.

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- She personally delivered 59 information sheets to farms and areas where she could see geese; there were thousands of geese in the low-lying lands in the Wallace Drive area.
- She thought there would have been a stronger response from the farming community.
- Surprisingly there were people from the Gulf Islands, Cowichan Valley, the golf course on Salt Spring Island, Oak Bay and View Royal.
- The farmers are too complacent; unless we get everyone on board, the strategy will not work.
- We also need to get a number of farmers who would allow a cull to take place on their properties; closer to the time for the cull a decision will be made as to which property will be used for the pilot project. This would not be made public for obvious reasons.
- She noted a suggestion to do an on-line survey or have displays and information at the Saanich Fair booth would not necessarily be a good thing as it could generate too much publicity – and not in a positive way.
- Although there is an active CRD Committee, it is just a part of their job. We need more people like Norm Dirkson involved to actually get things done. The CRD needs to have one person dedicated to geese and deer.

Rob Kline stated:

- Permits for the pilot cull are submitted by CRD Parks and will operate in a similar fashion to the deer cull in Oak Bay, keeping the actual details as quiet as possible once the date and location is approved.
- This is not an on-going CRD funded project: the funding from the Agriculture and Environment Initiative Programme is just for the pilot cull.
- That funding was approved because of information received about heavy financial and crop losses from local farmers.
- Re getting other organizations on board, an ambivalent response was received from Peninsula Streams; they have not endorsed the programme although they recognize the geese as invasive and habitat destroying birds.
- Canadian Wildlife Services has not contributed direct funding, but has provided staff time.
- The Victoria Airport Authority and the Department of National Defense are on board.
- Estimated \$70 per goose for the pilot cull; this is partially because no one in this area has participated in a cull before and there is a learning curve. There are an estimated 10,000 geese in the area and an ideal maintenance population has been set at 1,000 birds.

Discussion noted:

- Volunteers are working very hard on this project and perhaps they are wearing themselves out.
- Would be meaningful for the public to know the financial damages incurred by our farmers annually.
- There needs to be more leg-work, or a partnership with a wildlife organization or environmental group who could supervise students trained to addle eggs, for example.
- The geese continue to destroy our estuaries – surely there is some federal funding available.
- Anyone who cares about nature has to get one side with geese culling.
- We have been trying to solve this problem for years: we need to stop with the excuses and get a problem-solving person on board, as well as a strategist.
- The United States has a licensed programme to neuter deer, effective for 6 years, but it could cost \$5.5 million to get the licence in Canada – plus the \$250 a dose and \$600 to take the animal down to administer the dose. Costs for geese would be similar. Very unlikely this will happen.

Rob Kline stated the CRD is working on both the goose and deer strategies in a temporary mode; neither programme is fully funded and the funding could end at the next meeting – which is within the next two weeks.

Councillor Derman pointed out that the CRD can only act on a “service” that has already been agreed to by the municipalities it serves. For the CRD to be permanently involved, the programme has to be officially established as a service. The CRD has no budget other than the monies received from its municipalities. It was a battle last year to get the deer programme extended; if the geese programme is to be expanded again, we can expect a similar battle. A plan of action to get this approved as a CRD service would be to get several large rural areas to agree to put a proposal forward to the Board.

He stated five years ago he brought a report to Saanich Council advising of the serious problem with deer and geese recommending we find a way to address the issue. Nothing happened at that time, but we now have a new Council so he will try again with a revised report next month.

Rob Kline noted that Metchosin, Langford and Central Saanich are already on board. The CRD originally agreed to manage the project because of the problems they were having with geese in their regional parks.

PAAC discussion continued:

- Agreed we need to identify the areas where agriculture is impacted the most by the geese and ask for a letter of support from these areas.
- If we don't involve the owners of the beaches and parks, school grounds, golf courses, etc, then there is no point as the geese will continue to nest in these areas and eventually return to the farms.
- We can't deal with farmers in isolation or it will be a waste of time, effort and money.

Action:

Although acknowledged that it may have little or no effect, it was agreed that PAAC write a letter of support for the continued funding of the Geese and Deer Management Strategies by the CRD, encourage them to consider establishing a service going forward and take the lead on implementing recommendations of both strategies to develop a wildlife management service to the CRD municipalities.

b) Deer Management Strategy (Rob) – Nothing new to report at this time. (see above)

c) CRD Food Systems Strategy (Linda) – Not Present

d) ALR Core Review (Linda Geggie) – Not Present

e) Farmland Trust (Linda, Nikki, Mary Alice) – Not Present

f) Temporary Foreign Farm Workers Housing (follow-up on discussions from Feb/12 mtg)

Research re FWH regulations in Island Municipalities only found that the Cowichan Valley Regional District's OCP has a strict clause that may permit FWH but according to staff at the CWRD they are not aware of any such housing in the region. It was already noted at the last meeting that Pitt Meadows, Delta, Surrey and Abbotsford have some forms of FWH.

Bruce Greig, Planner from Central Saanich provided the following information by email:

- Streamlining the FWH approval process requires changes to regulatory bylaws.
- Some draft bylaws were developed to give farmers flexibility without opening a loophole for non-farm housing, but unfortunately that bylaw work was placed on the back burner as there were other projects higher on council's priority list.

- Council has now completed its annual strategic planning session and while not at the top of the list, he is optimistic some progress can be made this year.
- It is just as difficult and time consuming to get farm worker housing approved today as it was three years ago.

Kim Lonsdale submitted a brief report giving an example from Saskatchewan of a cost-efficient farm worker housing building that accommodates up to 12 workers. He noted the cost of \$120,000 building will pay for itself in about 2 years taking into account the cost of accommodation, food and transportation.

Councillor Graham stated that Central Saanich has been very supportive but is concerned that the bylaw could be misused. A bylaw would have to be carefully crafted as there is a huge demand for housing in this region, which could easily spill into agricultural areas. This is where the Temporary Land Use Permits come in to play.

Rob Kline these issues need to be discussed directly between the municipality and the ALC. In his experience, the problems are not the large commercial growers but the smaller farms who slip in a couple of workers.

Discussion noted:

- One of the issues is you can draft legislation to prevent loopholes, but the problem is enforcing it; that can be costly and is it worthwhile for a municipality to spend money on this?
- A few farmers on the Peninsula use trailers and campers to house a couple of workers for short periods of time now and then.
- A larger grower may require up to 60+ units but there are not many large growers on the Peninsula.
- There is no inventory of who actually needs housing, how much and for how long.
- PAAC has spent many hours discussing this topic and yet we do not know who needs it.
- 90% of farms do not need accommodations, so it is necessary for us to continue to debate this?
- If a farmer asks for our help, then we will assist them.

AGRICULTURAL STRATEGY – SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS

- a) Water (Michael Doehnel) – not present**
- b) Farm Economics (Terry Michell) – Not Present**
- c) Agricultural Land Base (Phil Christie)**

Phil stated:

- He does not have the benefit of background information on what has been discussed previously on this topic, or what percentage of land has been removed from the ALR.
- He noted not much has been done on this topic over the past two years and he asked what he can do to bring some light to the issue.

Discussion noted that the ALR is shrinking and there are less productive farms.

- People buy farms but use them as estates and perhaps just actively farm a small portions – eg: chickens or small market gardens. Or, they buy the property as an investment, holding for future

development potential. The land would still be classified as farmland for tax purposes; the current threshold for farm status is \$2,500 per year.

- However, even small-scale farmers buy equipment, produce food, employ people, etc.
- Bev Marley noted she had difficulty selling her 46-acre farm because no one wants such a large farm. It is now cheaper for her to maintain a 3.5 acre farm and pay taxes than to hire people to help her and achieve farm tax status.
- Noted that over two-thirds of the land in Central Saanich is within the ALR; \$27,000 in taxes was collected last year.
- Dianne Williamson asked is it fair that she has to follow strict rules and regulations to operate her large poultry farm and yet someone down the road can grow a few vegetables and get tax incentives?
- Farmers in their 60s are thinking of retiring, often the younger family members do not want to continue farming, and the land is difficult to sell as a large farm because it is so expensive in today's dollars.
- Over the next 10 years or so we will see family farms and commercial-scale farms disappear.

Councillor Derman noted that in Saanich there is land that is zoned A-1 but it is not in the ALR. The Planning Department is currently reviewing statistics as to how much ALR and A-1 land has been lost. The province can tell us how much ALR land is under productive farming.

Rob Kline stated the Ministry conducted an agricultural land use inventory of the Peninsula in 2005 and he will make this available to PAAC.

Councillor Graham stated the farm taxation issue is going to be considered in-depth. The minimum amount has been increased from \$2500 to \$3500 for farms between two and ten acres. The larger the farm, the higher the threshold.

d) Resource Stewardship – Kim Lonsdale – nothing to report

e) Education and Outreach (Linda Geggie) not present

Spring Bus Tour:

- Bev has contacted a number of farmers and received positive outcomes.
- Sea Cider has offered a tour with two tastings at no charge.
- Pendrays, Brice Rachley, Michells, Ryan Windsor (wine) have agreed.
- She is trying to get Eurossa Rose Gardens to agree to participate.
- Perhaps something to do with horse breeding and permaculture may be included.
- The meeting place will be at Michells, who have agreed to let us park there.
- From the top of the hill, you have a panoramic view and Dianne can talk about her poultry farm.
- The tour would start at 9:30 a.m., with lunch at Bev's farm, with wine provided.
- Michael Doehnel has agreed to be a speaker; perhaps we will have a second speaker.
- Samantha, Dianne and Isobel offered to assist Bev with the lunch preparations.
- A programme with a map will need to be prepared.
- Isobel will send out an initial notice to see how many people are interested, with a more formal invite to be sent later.
- Isobel reported an estimate for a 48-passenger coach bus from Wilsons, including insurance, was \$820. No mileage if the trip is less than 300 km.

Rob reminded PAAC that funding could be available through the Strategic Outreach programme; at least the cost of the speakers and transportation could be covered; he doubts the lunch would be covered. Costs have to be paid upfront and then reimbursed. Kim had previously offered to submit the application.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Max noted the Peninsula Country Market is looking for a Market Manager. Interested candidates can submit their resume to info@peninsulacountrymarket.ca Isobel will arrange for the information to be posted on the PAAC webpage.

Adjournment: On a Motion from Dianne Williamson, the meeting adjourned at 9:15 pm

Next Meeting: The next regular PAC meeting is scheduled for **April 9, 2015, 7:00 pm at Level Ground, Unit B, 1970 Keating X Road.**

WEBSITE: Members were asked to advise of any information items to place on the website.
<http://saanich.ca/living/afs/index.html>

I hereby certify this is a true and correct copy of the Minutes.

Isobel Hoffmann
Recording Secretary