

**SPECIAL MEETING  
PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION MEETING  
HELD BY ZOOM  
THURSDAY MARCH 11, 2021, 7:00 PM**

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In attendance: Phil Christie, Chair; Bev Marley; Carol Davidson (Treasurer) Terry Michell; RobinTunnickliffe (Metchosin); Dianne Williamson; Councillors Thompson(Central Saanich) and Smyth (North Saanich), De Vries (Saanich) and Isobel Hoffmann, recording secretary.

Guests: Emily Carmichael, Ministry of Agriculture; Adrienne Pollard, Environmental Services, Saanich; Carly Riel and Brian Green, North Saanich Planning; Anita Bijold.

Regrets: Linda Geggie, Larry Kimmett; Satnam Dheenshaw

Minutes: The Minutes of February 8, 2021 were adopted as circulated.

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**Treasurer's Report (Carol Davidson)** – No Change. The secretary advised a T-5 slip had been received indicating PAAC had earned \$684.82 in the 2020 tax year on its GIC. We have never received a T-5 before. The Treasurer to investigate and determine what, if anything, PAAC should do.

## **AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: NEW**

### **804/812/820 McKenzie & 4007 Rainbow Road (Saanich Referral) – ALR Exclusion**

The Saanich Planner recently advised she would not be attending the meeting as she had nothing further to add to the application. If PAAC wanted more information they should contact the ALC.

Anita Bijold, daughter of the owner of 4007 Rainbow Road, attended.

Carol Davidson provided background on the site dating back to the 1980s when certain properties in Saanich were surveyed by the ALC resulting in some being designated that should not have been included in the ALR. Ten years ago, a developer built two high residential towers behind the Rainbow/McKenzie properties, and the 4 properties are now surrounded by residential developments.

The Chair stated PAAC has been asked to provide comments indicating if (a) we have no objection to the project; (b) generally have no objection with suggested changes or concerns; and (c) do not support the project and provide reason why.

Discussion ensued and noted the following:

- Although PAAC is dedicated to supporting farmland on the Peninsula and adjacent areas, and one member cited the success of the Halliburton Community Farm which is also in Saanich, the majority of the members had no objections to the project being forwarded to the ALC for consideration to exclude the parcels from the ALR.
  - The Commission noted that these small parcels of land should not have been included in the first place, as they are interspersed with residential housing and rock outcroppings making much of it unsuitable for farming.
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- The Garry Oaks could be removed if the land were to be developed for farming within the ALR, whereas they would be better protected if the land is taken out of the ALR since the local bylaws regarding tree preservation would then apply.
- In this case, the land would be put to better use to provide housing for families rather than preserving within the ALR.

**MOTION:** Moved by Terry Michell and Seconded by Bev Marley: “That the Peninsula and Area Agricultural Commission generally has no objection to the application for exclusion from the ALR for the properties at 804/812/820 McKenzie Ave and 4007 Rainbow Street.”

CARRIED

## **NORTH SAANICH OCP REVIEW – Carly Rimel and Brian Green**

Brian Green and Carly Rimel with the North Saanich Planning Department attended to review the District's OCP Review process. Lotus Planning and Design will be assisting with the review, creating an over-arching vision of change in the community, providing tools to manage the changes and identifying issues. The District is working with Central Saanich and Sidney as they are also reviewing their OCPs as well; this will allow the consideration of regional issues.

- The topics being covered in the review include:
  - Agriculture & Food; Residential & Housing; Marine; Light Industrial; Commercial; Servicing; Heritage and Archaeology.
- Phase 1 was completed at the end of December.
- Information will now be gathered from stakeholder groups – like PAAC – public surveys and various events around the community and eventually a discussion paper prepared.
- Phase 2 continues until April 12 with community visioning and exploration of emerging concepts. It will identify key topics from the discussion paper, noting the current situation, trends, changes and opportunities.
- The District is looking for community help to build the vision and emerging concepts for North Saanich for the next 20 years on six key topics noted below, PAAC need only provide input on the Agriculture and Food Sector.
  - Agriculture & the Food Sector
  - Marine and Land-based Natural Systems
  - Climate Action
  - Healthy Communities
  - Housing & Affordability
  - Jobs & the Local Economy
- There is an online survey and other suggestions on how to provide input.
- May is the proposed deadline to prepare a design charette to assess areas within the district that could accommodate future growth and change to generate initial policy and design ideas for those areas.
- One third of the District's land base is within the ALR. 1,362 ha in total, out of which 670 ha (49%) is actively farmed and 321 ha (12%) is currently available for farming.
- Hay is the major crop, with only 8% of farmland actively producing food for human consumption.

- From our interactions with the community so far, we have learned that more engagement is needed with our farmers.
- Some of the challenges include:
  - access to farmland
  - farm labour
  - food processing infrastructure
  - new crops
- Opportunities include:
  - creating a food hub
    - encouraging landowners to lease vacant farmlands
    - collaborating with indigenous communities
    - landscape screening and buffering
- The District will engage with existing networks and we hope to get feedback from PAAC.
- Comments can be provided through [www.connectnorthsaanich.ca/ocp](http://www.connectnorthsaanich.ca/ocp)
- Some of the groups the District has reached out to include:
  - CR-Fair
  - Food for the Future
  - Circular Farm and Food Society
  - Growing Young Farmers Society
  - North Saanich Farm Market
  - ALC & Ministry of Agriculture and Food
  - Peninsula and Area Agricultural Advisory Commission
  - North Saanich Community Agricultural Advisory Commission

Discussion ensued and the following points were noted:

- Lot of dynamics and challenges for the First Nations.
- It is a challenge for farms to produce food for the local economy while at the same time addressing environmental pressures— eg: controlling weeds and the cutting down of hedgerows.
- more education on these issues is required.
- The OCP needs to provide a balance between the environment, agriculture and the First Nations community, and how this is established is important.
- Noted North Saanich has a few larger farms: Aylards, Gobinds, Pendrays, and Kildara Farms.
- Some of the airport lands are in the ALR.
- More farming is taking place today involving new technology, such as drones and robotics, making it more efficient. Some food can be grown vertically using a smaller footprint or farmed over 12 months of the year using greenhouses. Achieving more sustainable farming should be the goal of every farmer.
- Another group to reach out to would be the South Vancouver Island Direct Farm Marketing Association (SVIDFMA).

In response to a question on ways to provide input, Ms. Rimel stated the deadline for Phase 2 input is April 12. There will be virtual meetings, or comments can be provided online through a workbook or a public survey, which will take about 30 minutes. Only the section that is of interest to you needs to be completed. We do not have to reach a consensus; this is just an opportunity for dialogue to help establish a draft plan.

Councillor Smyth stated he has reached out to many smaller North Saanich farms over the years; he will provide a list to the Planning Group. He also noted this is a very busy time of the year for farmers and it may be hard for them to find the time to complete surveys.

## **AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: CURRENT**

### **Proposed Grape & Fruit Atlas for Vancouver Island – Phil Christie (Chair)**

- A reminder notice was sent to the wine and grape growers' groups further to our original enquiry last December as no responses have been received to date.
- Emily Carmichael stated she spoke to Adrian Arts at the Ministry who advised the Province funding the BC Wine and Grape Growers Council start up in 2016. A new update is being initiated this year and he suggested we hold off on the proposed Atlas until this update has been completed.

### **50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary - Establishment of the Agricultural Land Reserve (1972)**

Emily Carmichael stated:

- She passed along PAAC's suggestions to Lindsay McCourtenay with the Ministry who will pass them along to Kim Grout at the ALC.
- Apparently the plan is to look back on past celebrations – such as the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and decide whether they want to celebrate in 2022 or 2023.
- Emily stated she has contacted her supervisor to determine what group within the Ministry would be working on this project.

### **Central Saanich OCP Review: Bob Thompson**

Councillor Thompson stated:

- The OCP Advisory Committee meets monthly, and April is set aside for agricultural issues.
- Because the Advisory Committee members have no direct knowledge of farming, two of the district's large commercial farmers, Larry Sluggett and Terry Michell have been invited to the discussions and Phil Christie, the current Chair of PAAC has been asked to give a presentation on emerging issues.
- Perhaps there will be a virtual open meeting with other farmers to discuss the issues.
- It was suggested that Heather from Saanich Organics, and perhaps someone from Sea Cider (who incorporate agri-tourism into their business) attend to provide input.

### **Farm Worker Accommodations – Saanich – Pierre Iachetti**

Pierre was not present.

Terry Michell advised that the province recently announced it is going to help with the cost of bringing foreign farm workers to BC again this year. He noted that many farmers were not going to plant this spring until they had confirmation.

### **Resilient Saanich – Comments on the Terms of Reference**

Adrienne Pollard stated:

- Any information received will go directly to the Advisory Committee and then to Council.

- She appreciates Saanich Council's original Motion to include Climate Change in the proposed Terms of Reference. Food security is a big part of climate change.
- She doubts there will be any conflicts with the Advisory Committee's mandate vs agriculture, but it will be something to flag as the process moves forward.
- PAAC members can still complete the on-line comment form until next week.
- A virtual Open House will be held: [www.saanich.ca/biodiversity](http://www.saanich.ca/biodiversity)

Discussion noted:

- Sometimes the technical side of things and community influence over-ride what PAAC feels is important; our farmers need to speak out.
- The Chair stated that he will attend the upcoming OCP review meeting for Central Saanich (April 28<sup>th</sup>) because it is important that farmers are represented; however, it is doubtful that at this time of the year whether any farmers will have time to devote to this or commenting on the Resilient Saanich Policy.
- Hopefully PAAC can help work out the bumps so we can continue to support farming through the without too many challenges.
- Councillor Smyth stated he did not want to denigrate Adrienne's work, but it is incumbent on the farm community to stand up and be heard. He asked what kind of feedback has been provided by the farm community in Saanich.

Adrienne advised:

- Other than approaching PAAC, the farm community has not been contacted directly.
- However, residents and business within Saanich have been sent information on Resilient Saanich requesting input.
- To date, 150 feedback forms have been received but none have been reviewed yet. We are unable to download the information until the process is complete.
- We are hopeful there will be some responses from farmers.
- She will report back to the Commission to provide an update.

## **COMMENTS & UPDATES ON FARMING OPERATIONS SINCE MARCH 2020**

### **Potential Food Hub in Central Saanich**

Councillor Bob Thompson stated that the Ministry of Agriculture contacted the District of Central Saanich about a food hub. A recent announcement indicates there are 3 food hubs on the Island. However, we have since learned there is now no money available for a food hub at this time and it is on hold.

## **CORRESPONDENCE**

### **a) Letter to Federal and Provincial Ministries of Agriculture re Farm Insurance Costs**

The Secretary has drafted a letter to the Federal and Provincial Ministries of Agriculture about the rising costs of farm insurance, but felt more information was needed prior to sending the letter.

Emily Carmichael stated the Mid-Island Farmers' Institute is meeting next Thursday (March 17) to discuss the rising costs of farm insurance. She will send information about this to PAAC. Anyone is welcome to attend the ZOOM meeting.

Dianne Williamson agreed to attend on PAAC's behalf and report back at the April meeting. She noted that a couple of farms on the lower mainland saw their insurance increase by \$100,000 for 200-head of dairy cows. Her poultry operation insurance increased by \$45,000. All those with livestock saw their insurance rates increase.

CARRY to April Meeting

b) **Letters to Councils re 2021 appointments to PAAC**

The sponsoring Councils have been asked to endorse the appointment of Robin Tunnicliffe as a voting member of PAAC, in addition to her continuing to represent the Council of Metchosin. Another applicant, who had applied last year to PAAC although no action was taken due to COVID-19, was also recommended for appointment. A few weeks after the letter was submitted to the Councils the applicant advised she could no longer commit to the appointment.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

- a) Vancouver Island Agriculture Adaptation Group – Feb 4 Meeting – Bob Maxwell was not present at the meeting.
- b) 2020 Annual Report – Reports from 3 sub-committee chairs pending. Mike Doehnel has submitted his water report. The secretary urged members to submit their reports as soon as possible.
- c) Saanich Fair – Bob Thompson advised planning is going ahead for the 2021 Fair depending on the health regulations. Despite good intentions, nothing took place in 2020. He will keep PAAC advised.

Next Meeting: **Thursday, April 8, 2021, 7:00 pm by ZOOM**

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 8:25 pm