

**PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION MEETING
HELD BY ZOOM
THURSDAY NOVEMBER 18, 2021, 7:00 PM**

In attendance: Phil Christie Chair; Bev Marley; Terry Michell; Dianne Williamson; Councillor Graham (C. Saanich), Emily Carmichael, Ministry of Agriculture, and Isobel Hoffmann, recording secretary.

Guests: Andrew Peterson, Water Management Specialist, Ministry of Agriculture; Mike Doehnel; Andrea Pickard, Central Saanich Planning and Pierre Iachietti, Saanich Planning.

Regrets: Linda Geggie; Larry Kimmett; Satnam Dheenshaw, Robin Tunnicliffe, Larry Sluggett, Carol Davidson

Minutes: The Minutes of October 14 2021 were adopted as circulated.

Treasurer's Report (Carol Davidson) – Not present

PRESENTATION:

Andrew Peterson, Ministry of Agriculture, Water Management Specialist

- Andrew stated he will discuss ground water issues that have arisen because of the recent amendments to the new *Water Sustainability Act* (February 2016), regarding registration of groundwater wells, which will come into effect in March 2022.
- Many people are having trouble with the on-line application process to register their wells.
- If you do not register your well by the March 1 deadline, you will be treated as a “new user” and lose the historical rights to the well.
- A licence is only required for commercial or industrial use; it is not required for domestic or residential use.
- Andrew displayed screenshots showing the application process, noting that all the information required for your particular property is available online, if you know the tools to use and have basic information relating to your property.
- There will be an annual fee for the use of the well – minimum of \$50.
- There will be no application fee for those who apply before the March 1 deadline. In addition, you will retain the historical rights to the well and there will be less scrutiny than if you apply as a “new user”.
- As of May 2021, there are 8,000 wells, but only 2,400 applications have been received. Of those, 750 have been approved.
- There are online tools to help you calculate the volume of water used in a year.
- Co-op students are available to assist applicants.

- Discussion ensued, with Councillor Graham noting that a challenge in Central Saanich is the balance between larger and smaller farms. Is it important to register your well regardless of the size of your operation or level of use? What happens if use is expanded in the future?
- Is the licence fee higher the more water you use? He also questioned how many owners of smaller farms are aware of the requirement to register their wells.

- Andrew Peterson replied that you can indicate on your application if you intend to expand water use in the future on your existing land. If you expand your land holdings – that could be considered a new licence. The licence fee is currently \$0.85 per 100 m³ of water.
- He also noted that there are only so many wells; if you have a well and are not using it, a neighbour could complain because he needs a well, and your licence could be pulled.
- The Ministry has been concerned about the lack of registrations and is also concerned about smaller operations who may not be aware of the value of having a groundwater licence. Without a water supply, land loses its value.

Further discussion noted the following:

- All farmers who use groundwater should be encouraged to apply, even the small holdings.
- Some people believe there is an infinite supply of water; it is important to monitor the use and ensure we are not depleting the whole system.
- Most of the irrigation in the Fraser Valley comes from groundwater.
- A 2004 CRD reported indicated that groundwater use is fully maxed out; any extra water required has to come from the Sooke reservoir.

Andrew stated he will send a pdf of his presentation to Emily Carmichael at the Ministry for to PAAC members. He encouraged members to contact him if they have any further questions.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: NEW

a) Referral from Central Saanich: Draft Report on Housing & Ag Zones

- Andrea Pickard, Planner from Central Saanich, elaborated on the October 26, 2021, report from Jarret Matanowitsch, Director of Planning, regarding Housing & Agricultural Zones.
- Provincial legislative changes will come into effect in 2022 to allow local governments to permit a detached accessory dwelling unit on ALR lands, subject to conditions, without requiring ALC approval.
- Local governments will determine how they want to amend its bylaws accordingly.
- Under the new legislation, occupancy of the accessory dwellings is not restricted to family members or farm workers. Size of the dwelling depends on the lot area.
- Central Saanich is considering applying similar regulations for accessory buildings to its rural properties, allowing a carriage house or cottage as an alternative to a secondary suite in the principal dwelling:
 - Currently secondary suites are allowed up to 90m², any additional accessory building would require a rezoning but not ALC approval.
 - The options are to consider a carriage house or other accessory dwelling rather than a suite or allow for both a suite and an accessory dwelling. Neither option requires ALC approval. Farm status and lot size do come into consideration for these options.
- If Central Saanich considered allowing three dwelling units (principal house, suite and a carriage house) in rural zones, should the same be permitted within agricultural zones?

- The proposed amendments could provide rental income for small farms.
- If approved, the Land Use Bylaw would be amended, adding a maximum separation of 50 m from the principal house to the carriage house and Council is asking for a similar provision for agricultural zones.
- The report was referred to PAAC by Council, with the following questions:
 1. Whether the status quo should be extended from rural to agricultural lands, as per the staff recommendations (*from the report*).
 2. Alternatively, whether consideration should be given for setting the same regulations for rural and agricultural lands related to:
 - a) The maximum size limits for the principal dwelling; and
 - b) The proximity for accessory dwellings to the primary dwelling
 3. Whether allowing three dwellings as a maximum in both rural and agricultural lands is supportable.
 4. Whether an agricultural use, farm development plan, or agricultural intensity test be a condition.

PAAC discussion ensued: (*please note that because a few of our members were missing from the actual meeting, some of the following comments were provided by email after the meeting*)

- The agricultural community needs flexibility for farm workers.
- The proposed amendments around occupancy are good progress.
- If you make rules too prescriptive it becomes very limiting for the farmer.
- Flexibility is the key: perhaps include a land use planning report depending on the access, topography, trees and vegetation, for example.
- As well, dwellings should not be placed on high-quality arable land.
- The question of additional taxes was raised if there were rental units on a farm. Andrea suggested BCAA would be able to answer those questions, although it was noted that if a designated farm worker is living in the accessory dwelling, the tax rate would be different from that of a non-farm worker renting the property.
- There should be some restrictions on the overall footprint of the carriage house and the suite – or both – and how it ties into the main house, barns, greenhouses, garages, sheds, driveways and parking areas, large equipment storage and other uses. Development sites should be nested, compacted and near the main road in order to retain as much crop production on the land as possible.

b) Referral from Saanich: 443 Hector Road – ALR Non-Farm Use Application

Background:

- At its October 10, 2020, meeting, PAAC received a Planner's report regarding an ALR application for 424 and 443 Hector Road to allow for a non-farm use for storage of topsoil for the Rainbow Valley Nursery Ltd., owned by John MacNutt.
- Although PAAC had no serious objections and noted the land was rocky and not adjacent to other farms, it was recommended that an agrologist's report should be carried out. The staff recommendation was for rejection, and Council recommended not forwarding the application to the ALC.

- In June 2021 a subsequent ALR temporary non-farm use application was received from Corvidae Environmental Consulting for 443 Hector Road to use a portion of the property as a staging area for materials and equipment needed to pave the main traffic areas on Allan Road. The applicant was advised that the previous application was rejected, but they still wanted to proceed – which generated a new ALR application which has now been referred to PAAC. In the applicant's view, this is a new and separate application.

Discussion ensued, with various viewpoints noted:

- This is probably a good use of the property as it is rocky with shallow soils and unlikely to produce any type of agricultural crop. Again, noted that PAAC had previously recommended an agrologist's report to determine soil quality.
- The yard and garden waste from the Saanich Municipal Yard is dropped off here.
- The ALR was put in place to protect the better class of lands – Class 4 and up.
- However, class 5, 6 and 7 lands can still manage farming activities such as greenhouses, which should be placed on the lower-class farmlands.
- A member noted that generally we have been opposed to greenhouses, but if we want to have fresh food 12 months of the year, we have to start vertical and greenhouse farming. Putting this on lower class lands is optimal.
- Often acres of farmland sit over the winter months, whereas greenhouse production can continue all year.
- Once the land is paved and greenhouses installed – they are there for good. There is no going back.
- Food quality is higher when grown in the open air rather than greenhouses.

Comments to be forwarded to Saanich Planning accordingly.

c) Broad Leaf Herbicides in Hay (Carol Davidson)

Carol wasn't present at the meeting, but the Chair spoke to the issue she raised in an email, noting that these herbicides get applied to some of the bigger farms and cause serious problems – such as when the compost from horses is used for gardens.

- He became aware of the issue in the 1980s when his father applied some 2-4D for weed control then used lawn clippings in the compost, and it damaged his crops. If you are a gardener and apply compost that is derived from manufactured pyridine carboxylic acids, it is a problem.
- As Carol noted, when people buy imported hay, or the horse manure from roadside stands, are they checking for this herbicide? www.tenthacrefarm.com/manure-garden

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: CURRENT

a) Saanich Farm Worker Housing Policy Update – Pierre Iachetti

- Staff have been working on the report for some time. A draft policy is also being prepared.

- Recent changes by the Agricultural Land Commission to ALR regulations put the matter on hold until recently. In response to the changes, the report has been simplified.
- Council has not yet seen the staff report, but it is hoped this can happen in early January. The intent is to include feedback from PAAC, the Ministry of Agriculture and the ALC.

Councillor Graham stated as both Central Saanich and Saanich are currently working on the same issue, it would be beneficial for them to work together. Pierre advised he has been in contact with Ivo Van Der Kamp at Central Saanich in this regard.

b) Funding for Hedgerows: (Bob Maxwell) - Carry

c) Golden Nematode Restrictions in Central Saanich – Brent Postlewhaite from the Ministry of Agriculture will speak at the January meeting.

d) Verling Road Vet Clinic – Update from Central Saanich

Andrea Pickard, Planner, Central Saanich, stated in response to discussion at previous meetings and the letter sent by PAAC, the Zoning Bylaw will be amended to allow for large farm animals – not just horses, but all large animals (cows, pigs, sheep, etc.). The Public Hearing is scheduled for Monday, November 22, 2021. The rezoning for the Vet Clinic will be sent to the ALC for comment.

e) Central Saanich OCP Update

Andrea Pickard, Planner, Central Saanich, thanked PAAC for its comments on the OCP. Staff are still working on many of the issues and the original target date set with the consultant has been moved to a tentative new date of February 2022 for the Public Open House and other on-line engagement with various stakeholders and groups. It is hoped by early June, the final draft can be circulated for comments, including PAAC and the Ministry of Agriculture.

f) Water Update – Mike Doehnel

Mike stated that the budget meetings for the Regional Water Commission are in late October. It has been decided to keep the water rate the same for 2022. Councillor Graham stated he also sits on the Regional Water Commission and has been an advocate for keeping the agricultural water rate as low as possible.

It was suggested that the Water Commission make a presentation to PAAC; Mike agreed and will look into it.

MOTION: Moved by Bev Marley and Seconded by Dianne Williamson: “That Mike Doehnel be reappointed as the agricultural representative on the Saanich Peninsula Water Commission.”

CARRIED

COMMENTS, UPDATES, CONCERNS RE FARMING OPERATIONS

Noted that most of the fall crops have been harvested from the Martindale Valley before there was too much flooding. The Peninsula is in better shape than the lower mainland.

CORRESPONDENCE

- a) **Central Saanich & Saanich re proposed Drainage Sub-Committee**
A letter was sent to encourage the municipalities to form a joint committee, with Council, staff and PAAC representation to find solutions to the continual drainage issues in the Martindale Valley and other areas. No response received to date.

Discussion noted:

- Water is a precious commodity. Why are we not capturing the water in some way rather than letting it flood the lands and then drain out into the ocean. The water could be captured, filtered and reused for irrigation.
- Think how much it will cost to install drainage and to build a retention pond. It will be water storage for the future as it is likely there could be more heat waves or heat domes.
- Many areas are covered in water including the Island View Road area and Stanhope Farm. Last week, 1.5 acres of land was under water. On Monday over 400 acres was under water.

Councillor Graham thought these were excellent points. He stated that a few years ago, Central Saanich and Saanich Councils met for the first time since “the divorce”. There is a lot of shared interest in the farmland adjoining both municipalities. The problem is Council doesn't have the expertise to deal with the broader issues. He agreed with the current approach PAAC is taking. Flooding problems will continue to increase – as well as drought in the summer.

The Chair noted that both he and Terry Michell attended this meeting, together with all of Central Saanich Council; unfortunately, Zac De Vries was the only Councillor from Saanich. It was agreed that in order to move this issue forward both municipalities have to participate.

- b) Letter to CRD re Mike Doehnel's reappointment to the SPWC. See above; Mike Doehnel recommended for reappointment.

OTHER BUSINESS

Vancouver Island Agriculture Adaptation Group – Bob Maxwell – not present

Phil Christie – Resignation

Phil stated for personal reasons, he is taking a break and resigning from PAAC. He may return at some future date.

Future Membership

Some suggestions were made for potential members. The secretary will try to make contact with them and others. Members were asked to let Isobel know if they have any other suggestions. We need at least 3 members for 2022.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

It was agreed that due to Covid, we cancel the usual **PAAC Christmas Gathering**. It was suggested a summer barbecue could be held instead.

Emergency Assistance to Farmers on Mainland

Emily Carmichael stated that some Ministry employees, herself included, have been directed to assist with the emergency situation caused by the serious flooding of farms in the lower mainland.

Next Meeting: **Thursday, January 13, 2021, 7:00 pm via ZOOM**

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 9:10 pm

Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary

PARKING LOT (Pending Issues)

1. T-5 slip from 2020 further to interest on PAAC's GIC
2. Grape & Fruit Atlas for Vancouver Island
3. 50th Celebration of ALR 2022 (ALC & Ministry of Agriculture)
4. Appointment of new representative from Minister's Office
5. Rising cost of farm insurance
6. Additional Farm Tours with Brian Spencer for Council members (Spring 2022)