

**PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION MEETING  
HELD BY ZOOM  
THURSDAY MAY 12, 2022, 7:00 PM**

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In attendance: Robin Tunnicliffe in the Chair; Bev Marley; Terry Michell; Larry Sluggett; Dianne Williamson; Councillor Paltiel (C. Saanich) and Councillor Smyth (N.Saanich), and Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary.

Guests: Mike Doehnel; Anita Bull; Katie Underwood; Jenni Michell; Mike Doehnel; Bob Maxwell; Ronna Woudstra, HAT; Jeff Weightman, Ministry of Agriculture.

Regrets: Satnam Dheenshaw, Linda Geggie

Minutes: The Minutes of April 14, 2022 were adopted as circulated.

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**TREASURER'S REPORT –**

- Bob Maxwell and Bev Marley reported that Bob and Carol Davidson are still signing authorities; Bev is not.
- Through discussions with Island Savings it has been arranged that the secretary, Isobel, will have access to financial information and download monthly statements, but won't have the ability to write cheques or withdraw funds.
- Suggested that once PAAC appointments are finalized we appoint a new Treasurer and arrange for signing authority. Carol's name should be removed.

**SPEAKER'S BUREAU – None**

**AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: NEW**

**SaanichFair – Linda Geggie**

- Linda was unable to attend but emailed information about the Fair.
- She has reached out to a few supporting organizations and there is an interest in sharing and rotating the booth over the 3 days. They can display their information and supply volunteers during their designated day.
- Some of the interested groups include HAT (Hedgerows) and pollinator groups; the South Island Farm and Food Hub.
- Help from PAAC members needed to set up on the Friday and take down on the Monday.
- Terry had already agreed to provide hay, corn and produce to display.
- Wrist bands for volunteers to be requested as in past years.

Brief discussion ensued, noting that while its good to get volunteers from other organizations, the space then is not about PAAC. It is still a lot of work and a big commitment.

MOTION Moved by Bev Marley and Seconded by Terry Michell: “That PAAC not participate in the Saanich Fair this year.”

CARRIED

The Secretary to advise Bob Thompson and Linda Geggie accordingly.

## **AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – CURRENT**

### **a) Saanich Farm Worker Housing – Pierre Iachietti not present**

### **b) HAT – Hedgerow Project – Ronna Woudstra**

- Bev Marley stated she thinks PAAC has been misled regarding the hedgerow project because the recent information received regarding budgets and future plans is not what we were expecting.
- She thought the intention was for PAAC to enhance and assist with an existing project in the amount of \$500 per approved application from a farmer.
- It was not PAAC's intent to finance the programme and pay salaries and expenses.
- She understood that HAT was a dedicated volunteer organization.
- She suggested that we cancel our support at this time.

Ronna Woudstra, HAT, apologized for the confusion and stated:

- HAT is a non-profit organization that has full time paid staff as well as a large group of volunteers that the staff coordinate.
- Most of HAT's funding comes from government sources.
- A proposed budget for a workshop was submitted as part of the implementation programme.
- She understood that if there was an education component it would be up to PAAC.
- The main focus for HAT right now is around Garry Oak meadows – which has been fully funded.
- There were several “in kind” supports included in the workshop budget proposal but we cannot support speaker fees and mileage. However, if the workshop is not on the table for PAAC that is okay. HAT could do a You Tube video for interested farmers about hedgerows.
- The application process, screening of applicants and providing guidelines were part of the original Motion from PAAC that was discussed with Paige, who is now on leave.
- Ronna stated she is happy to renegotiate the hedgerow component as it is an awesome project that supports agriculture.
- It sounds as if there has been some miscommunication, especially regarding Garry Oak meadows. She will re-send Paige's email regarding the Garry Oak meadow component to PAAC.
- HAT, with the help of Laura Morrardan from the Island Pollinators group, has completed 3 hedgerow projects on farms - including Robin's Sea Bluff Farm in Metchosin. Laura would be one of the people helping with the workshop.

PAAC discussion ensued as follows:

- Members were interested in seeing Robin's hedgerow; noted some of the hedgerows on the Peninsula are very green with no flowers. Ronna mentioned there is a hedgerow at Lohbrunner farm that is just flowers. It is up to the individual farmer as to what he wants to plant.
- Most members agreed with Bev's opinion to withdraw our support at this time; we have limited funds available and the budget proposal from HAT seems to focus on the education component and it looks like PAAC would be funding other non-farming groups.

- Ronna explained that the workshop was exclusively to benefit the farmers who applied to the programme.

MOTION: Moved by Terry Michell and seconded by Bev Marley: “That PAAC's contribution and involvement in the programme be postponed until we see a more direct link to agriculture and have more information.”

Discussion noted:

- On the Peninsula, many farms have hedgerows already; some local farmers indicated they didn't think they would be interested in planting hedgerows. It would be something that farmers would have to work around continuously as they travel by tractor from field to field.
- For PAAC to be involved, the programme would have to be more centred on agriculture.
- For organic farming in particular, having hedgerows is a no-brainer. It saves a lot of money; Robin stated they didn't have to spray for aphids once last year. She was surprised at the benefits from the hedgerow. She hopes that PAAC will decide to revisit the programme in the future, but respects there is not a lot of support at this time.

\*\*\*\*Larry Sluggett entered the meeting at 7:25 pm \*\*\*\*

Ronna stated:

- She is open to flexibility going forward and can try to focus on projects in the Saanich Peninsula area.
- Perhaps next year there will be some farmers on board, but it may be best to let the project sit for a while and revisit in the future.
- She apologized if HAT was not clear as this was not their intention; she hoped going forward there would be more transparency.

The Motion was then Put and Carried.

### c) **Central Saanich OCP – Update**

Councillor Paltiel stated Central Saanich held a focus meeting on March 16 to review some of the guidelines in the OCP. Another meeting was scheduled in April. Valuable discussion resulted from the meetings.

- Some of the items discussed were regulations around farm stands and inter-generational farming.
- Some municipal regulations are superseded by the province and the Right to Farm Act.
- At the same time, municipalities can take steps to improve things from a land use perspective.
- A new draft will be prepared based on comments noted and feedback requested.
- When the draft is available he will ensure staff refer the document to PAAC for comment.
- At that time it can be determined if there is the need for another focus meeting with PAAC and Central Saanich Farmers to discuss the agricultural component of the OCP.
- He stated he is available if members wish to discuss the plan.

In response to a question about how the **Food Hub** group in Central Saanich was initiated, and what the goal is, Councillor Paltiel stated:

- As far as he is aware, food hubs are a priority within the Strategic Plan and qualify for provincial funding opportunities as they become available. Staff are working on a grant proposal. He is not familiar with the meeting that took place last night. He would be happy to pass feedback from PAAC to staff.

Bev Marley stated she was one of eight people who attended the meeting last night. It was very interesting. One of the attendees was from the Victoria Food Hub and provided feedback on what was needed in terms of infrastructure.

- She wondered if there was enough produce available to support this food hub as we already have a large one in Victoria.
- It seems the food hubs can be expensive to operate and she doesn't understand how funds can be generated to maintain the hub.
- She questioned where the hub might be located. She had thought about Woodwyn Farms, but that is now no longer officially part of Central Saanich as it is owned by the First Nations.

Larry Sluggett asked if Central Saanich had given any more thought to reinstating its Agricultural Advisory Committee. This committee allowed for input from the local community on local issues. Central Saanich is the bread basket for the region; it is important.

Councillor Palteil stated he was in the minority to reinstate the advisory committee; local knowledge carries a lot of value. The issue has not come up for Council discussion recently.

#### **d) Drainage Sub-Committee**

##### **- Keating X Road Overpass – Meeting with Ministry of Highways**

Councillor Palteil and Terry Michell met recently with the Ministry of Highways on site at Keating Cross Roads.

- The Ministry was asked if there would be a filtration system to catch the water before it goes down the hill and into the ditches adjacent to Martindale Flats.
- A few farmers have raised this concern because apparently the plan was to simply allow the unfiltered water to run into the ditches. There were no water retention plans to allow the water to be released slowly to prevent major flooding.
- Terry stated there is no way that more water can be added to the existing ditch along Martindale Flats. A few farmers would like to get together with the engineers at Central Saanich and Councillor Palteil to ensure the Ministry does a good job on this.
- The ALC should be involved as well – and it needs to be done before it is too late.
- He noted that North Delta receives funding for drainage to agricultural lands when new highways are built. This project at Keating is no different.

Councillor Palteil stated the Ministry of Highways is the only ministry exempt from land water management policies. When talking to Mike Pearson a few years ago before the plans for the overpass were announced, Central Saanich was clear that water management had to be part of the project, as well as talking to the valley farmers.

- He agreed there must be water controls, adding additional permeable surfaces. There is an opportunity to include this within the scope of the project.
- He will meet with staff to arrange a meeting with the Ministries of Agriculture and Highways to discuss a proposal for land water management to control the water flow towards Martindale Flats.

Terry noted that apparently Central Saanich has not hired a new engineer yet. Central Saanich did appoint Councillor Thompson as the Central Saanich Council Liaison. Saanich has appointed Lesley Hatch as the engineering liaison and advised a Council representative will be appointed when required.

**e) Water Update – Mike Doehnel**

- In theory, he should be hearing something tomorrow at the Regional Water Committee Meeting, or next week at the Water Advisory Committee, meeting in response to PAAC's reminder letter regarding the difference in municipal water rates (letter originally sent in May 2019).
- Part of the reason given for the non-response was staff shortages; only one applicant applied for the position which would be partially responsible for looking into the municipal water rates. He is not sure if they plan to accept the one applicant, or re-advertise.

**f) Goose Management  
– Donation to Guardians of the Mid-Island Estuaries (GOMIE)**

The secretary confirmed that the letter from PAAC has been sent to GOMIE offering \$4,000 to support the egg addling and banding programmes as part of the Goose Management Strategy underway.

- She asked for further direction regarding sending copies of the letter to the municipalities, the Ministry of Agriculture, MLA's, MP's, SIDFMA, golf courses, Airport Authority, Parks Canada, CRD Parks, etc. requesting matching funds, on an ongoing basis.
- The intent is that GOMIE would have secure annual funding to operate the programme without having to source funding each and every year.
- Information received from Ted Clermont, GOMIE, by email stated:
  - *“We are now wrapping up the spring addling work; significant effort was made at several Saanich Peninsula Farms with high nest densities.*
  - *Thanks to PAAC's support we also were able to find hundreds of nests at the Oak Bay Islands and visited private Quarries, commercial sites and many other farms from Sooke, Colwood, and Metchosin.*
  - *I believe our next step will be to provide a summary of this work along with an invoice for \$4,000.*

- *We will be conducting a molt survey around the time of the July 14<sup>th</sup> meeting so perhaps we can provide an update on regional populations and plans to work with local First Nations at that time. I believe the MOU Jody has mentioned is an amendment of our initial agreement with the CRD so not required for your contribution to our addling work and molt surveys.”*
- Jeff Weightman stated a staff report on the Goose Management Strategy will be presented to the CRD's Environmental Sustainability Committee on May 18. The meeting can be observed through the CRD's website.

Discussion ensued, noting the following:.

- The First Nations are addling eggs on their lands.
- GOMIE has done a lot of work on the programme this past year; they know the hot spots.
- It takes 3-4 years before changes in population numbers are noticed.
- According to GOMIE, estimated 4,000 birds were on Silver Rill's fields recently.
- Jeff stated geese and other wild birds across BC have been randomly tested for avian flu. Some positive and negative results.

The Secretary to follow up with GOMIE and Jody Watson at the CRD regarding who to reach out to regarding funding so we don't duplicate requests. Jeff will send information on the golf courses on the Island.

#### **COMMENTS, UPDATES & CONCERNS RE FARMING OPERATIONS:**

- Robin stated she has sub-terranial drainage on her farm and they have been able to get on to the fields during this wet season. She thinks this will be a great pollinator year once it warms.
- Noted that it has to be 17° before nectar starts to flow and this a concern re pollination.
- Saanich Organics has not been able to start planting as fields are too wet..
- Restaurant sales are down this spring.
- Michell Farms has done half the planting they normally do, but have 30 acres under floating row cover. There has been so much wind in some areas that irrigation has been necessary.
- The strawberries have blossoms and vegetables are selling well.
- Firbank Farms has been harvesting rhubarb for the past couple of months – 6,000 lbs from one patch. They have been picking up to 35 lbs of asparagus every other day for about 3 weeks.
- Anita stated she has not been able to plant on her Saanich fields as they are too wet. The squash has been started in the greenhouse with 70% germination but is not growing well. Normally she would be planting this weekend but everything is about 3 weeks behind.
- Katie reported that the garden beds are prepped and ready to go but it has been too cold and wet.
- Mike stated this time last year 120 acres were seeded; this year there is zero.
- Robin mentioned her neighbour grows wheat; they missed the planting window and now believe there won't be sufficient time to grow and dry the wheat properly before the fall rains.
- Everyone is in the same boat – too cold and too wet to plant.

- Seed sales are also down compared to the last couple of years, not only in BC but also on the east coast and the US. This is partly due to the higher fuel costs and growers are not planting as much. This is concerning in terms of food security.
- Climate change is also part of the issue: California is burning and we are drowning.

Regarding the Avian flu, Diane reported that her farm is still on Red Security Level until mid-June. They have been taking all the required precautions and keeping the birds indoors..

- She is now being charged a 1% fuel surcharge, which is between \$200 and \$600 per week.

## **CORRESPONDENCE – No correspondence**

### **VANCOUVER ISLAND AGRICULTURE ADAPATION GROUP – Bob Maxwell**

- nothing new to report at this time.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

The secretary confirmed that the 3 new applicants have been endorsed by Central Saanich, North Saanich and Metchosin. Saanich required an ad to be placed in the Saanich News. This was done and the deadline for applications is the end of the week. She doubts there will be any applications and will advise PAAC accordingly when she hears from Saanich.

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

### **Barbecue at Sea Bluff Farm – Sunday June 5, 2022**

Robin invited PAAC members and their partners to attend a potluck bbq at Sea Bluff Farm, starting around 4pm. An email with more details will be sent.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

### **Identification & Soil Development:**

- Bev noted that a few years ago Bob led a tour in the forested area near Camosun College which was very informative and she suggested we do this again, in another location.
- Terry noted he had soil identification work completed on his farm as well; they dug down to 5' and it was interesting to see the different levels and types of soils.
- Discussion noted the Ministry of Agriculture did similar soil identification work (Geoff Hughes-Gains); Jeff Weightman offered to look into this, noting perhaps something could be coordinated with the Island Agriculture Show in July this year.

### **Update from Jeff Weightman**

- The Ministry is hosting various webinars on nutrient management, fruit tree stabilization, and the blueberry scorch virus. If anyone is interested reach out to him and he will pass on contact information.
- The Investment Agriculture Foundation is out of funds; the province is negotiating agreements for the programmes under the IAF over the next few months.
- In terms of accessing funding and outreach right now for the Goose Management Strategy, this is not a good time; he suggested waiting until new programmes have been announced. He will try to keep PAAC up to date on any progress.

- In response to a question, he advised he doesn't know happening with Land Matching Programmes, and noted he would like to see more work done in this area.

**NEXT MEETING:** The next PAAC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, July 14, 2022 at 7:00 pm  
**NOTE:** there is no scheduled June meeting.

**ADJOURNMENT:** The meeting adjourned at 8:45 pm

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Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary

**PARKING LOT (Pending Issues)**

1. T-5 slip from 2020 & 2021 further to interest on PAAC's GIC
2. Grape & Fruit Atlas for Vancouver Island
3. 50<sup>th</sup> Celebration of ALR 2023 (ALC & Ministry of Agriculture)
4. Appointment of new representative from Minister's Office
5. Additional Farm Tours with Brian Spencer for Council members (Spring 2022)
6. Agriculture in the Classroom
7. Agricultural Land Reserve Inventory
8. Rising cost of poultry operations & discussions with FIRB
9. Response from Water Commission re variances in municipal water rates
10. Partial redemption of GIC in August
11. Investment Agriculture Fund