

**PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION MEETING  
COMMITTEE ROOM #2 – SAANICH MUNICIPAL HALL  
THURSDAY NOVEMBER 3, 2022, 7:00 PM**

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In attendance: Robin Tunnicliffe in the Chair; Dianne Williamson; Terry Michell; Larry Sluggett; Anita Bull; Katie Underwood; Councillors Smyth (N. Saanich), Paltiel (Central Saanich) and De Vries (Saanich) and Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary.

Guests: Bob Maxwell; Dale Green, CRD; Russ Benwell, Red Barn Market, Megan Halstead, Regional Agrologist

Regrets: Satnam Dheenshaw; Jenni Michell; Linda Geggie

Minutes: The September 8 , 2022 Minutes were adopted as circulated.

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**TREASURER'S REPORT - Jenni Michell (not present)**

- The Secretary reported that the relevant information to register Jenni Michell as the PAAC Treasurer for 2022/23 has been delivered to Island Savings, Brentwood Branch.
- \$4,000 has been repaid to PAAC's Saanich account to cover the donation to GOMIES this summer.
- A cheque has been issued to Bob Thompson via the Saanich account for \$188.90 for Saanich Fair expenses.
- Current balances: \$17,005 in a cashable GIC, due in August 2023; \$1,586 in the chequing account.

**SPEAKER'S BUREAU**

Dale Green, Supervisor, Regional Source Control Programme, CRD Environmental Protection, attended and provided information on what's happening in the Region from workshops, geese management, storm water management, environmental management programmes, Agricultural Food Strategy. A summary follows:

**Storm water management:**

- Request for Proposal (RFP) for an outreach initiative on stormwater management for the agricultural sector has been awarded to Hatchet and Seed (Tayler Kraczyk).
- Their task is to develop an updated set of 4 workshops that are based on the 2015-2017 CRD-hosted workshops for agriculture to educate on KeyLine design. The central idea behind 'Keyline' water management is to *slow*, *sink* and *spread* rainwater.
- With the aim to recharge groundwater and decrease surface contaminant runoff into our rural watersheds and receiving environments, the one-day workshops will explore innovative integrated water management and soil building practices.
- The agricultural sector is often a source of nutrient and fecal bacterial runoff with potential to impact local waterways and shorelines.

- The agricultural lands that produce the region's food and other important economic goods are increasingly impacted by factors including: development, stormwater pollution, increased runoff, flooding, and climate change.

### **Monitoring Programmes:**

- The CRD **Environmental Monitoring Program** supplies the data that helps focus our efforts; annually monitors streams, shorelines and discharges for basic parameters that are indicators of contamination.
- Bacterial monitoring in rural/agricultural have areas of concern where agriculture is one of many contributors among many sources, although there are very few examples where we point directly to agriculture.
  - Nearshore and stormwater discharges show elevated fecal bacteria in **Coles Bay** and we know that **Elk/Beaver Lake** has historical nutrient issues leading to algae blooms caused by phosphorous accumulation. **Tseycum, Hagen and Tetayut Creeks** show either/both elevated bacteria or nutrients.
- The issue is complex because rural areas with agriculture also are usually areas with household septic tanks and residential/business sewer customers that have their own stormwater runoff.

### **What is the response?**

Five key areas to be addressed concurrently: goose management, general stormwater, stormwater source control, septic systems, and agriculture.

### **Goose Management**

- Increasing populations of Canada geese are causing significant impacts to estuary habitats, ecological reserves, recreational fields, beaches and lakes, and agricultural crops, resulting in increasing pressure on local governments to take coordinated action.
- In early 2022, CRD staff and the Guardians of the Mid-Island Estuaries (GoMIES) initiated conversations with local government staff, farmers, large property owners, and other government agencies regarding a coordinated approach to managing Canada goose populations in the region. There was general support for a more coordinated approach to reducing goose populations and a need for inter-regional conversations across Vancouver Island was identified.
- Staff prepared a service establishing bylaw to monitor goose populations and to coordinate partnerships between land use agencies under various jurisdictions, including First Nations, federal and provincial wildlife agencies, parks and recreation boards, local and regional governments, airport authorities, farmers and other owners of large properties to support effective management of Canada geese in the capital region.
- A regional **Canada Goose Management Service** will facilitate coordinated management of goose populations and would include:
  - monitoring, mapping, reporting on Canada Goose populations and their impacts
  - coordinating and establishing collaborative partnerships with municipalities, First Nations, large landowners, this Commission, other government agencies and

stewardship groups to implement the CRD's Regional Canada Goose Management Strategy and manage Canada Goose populations in the region

- facilitating the development and implementation of a communications strategy and public education program to support the management of Canada Goose populations
- collaboration with other Vancouver Island regional districts, local governments and First Nations to reduce Canada Goose populations through the Vancouver Island Canada Goose Management Working Group.
- Due to the movement and behaviour of Canada geese, controlling their population is a shared responsibility of private land owners, local governments, provincial and federal agencies and First Nations and requires a regionally coordinated effort.
- A regional goose management service is only effective if all municipalities and electoral areas participate, therefore a **regional alternative approval process (AAP)** is underway before years end. If 10% of residents were not in favour, they could determine not to proceed.

### **Onsite service (septic)**

- Our onsite service regulates homeowners in Colwood, Langford, View Royal and Saanich. Additionally, we provide education to most of the region via website, social media, Septic Week media and public sessions (*Septic Savvy*).
- Requirements are simple. Type 1 (the most common) is pumped out every 5 years. Types 2 and 3 are inspected/maintained annually and have maintenance plans. We have >80% compliance with the bylaw.
- Maintenance Assessment Rebates will be available to homeowners to assess functioning of their system and hopefully repair issues.

### **Stormwater Source Control on the Peninsula**

- The program helps reduce contaminants entering municipal stormwater infrastructure and its impacts to the environment, both freshwater and marine by promoting business practices that are protective of the environment and by working with municipalities to create regulation for practices with risk of contamination.
- The CRD *Saanich Peninsula Stormwater Source Control Bylaw* was adopted by the CRD Board in 2017 and implementation began in 2018 with two years of site visits, information gathering about business practices and discussion with business staff. .
- In 2020, the service began applying a proactive enforcement strategy to move businesses away from stormwater discharge of contaminants to alternate solutions such as changing business practice, off-site waste treatment, or sanitary sewer discharge.
- The program also aims to reduce the amount of stormwater entering the sanitary sewer system which can overwhelm pump stations and treatment plants and increases treatment costs to treat clean water.
- In 2023 this approach will continue, and focus remains on industrial parks at Keating Cross Road and Victoria Airport Authority.

## **Agriculture:**

- The outreach initiative supports priority efforts and actions of the following corporate priorities:
  - Corporate Plan (8a-1): Advance management of wastewater and storm water through liquid waste management planning and construction/maintenance of facilities.
  - Corporate Plan (10b-1): Improve water conservation through Demand Management Programs.
  - Climate Action Strategy (4-12a): Work with local governments and community groups to promote, encourage and inform green infrastructure and improved stormwater management approaches.
  - Regional Food Agriculture Strategy (4): Address chronic drainage issues across the region.
- This project will help participating farmers to better understand their farm watersheds (using free, local GIS maps) and provide possible solutions to better managing water on their landscapes.
- Using principles of *slow, sink, spread and plan for overflow*, this outreach program will bring farmers together to highlight and discuss best practices for water management in a changing climate.
- Improved stormwater management on agricultural lands will help reduce peak flows, flooding events, and agriculturally sourced contaminants entering local creeks and streams.
- This is done by distributing excess water towards drier parts of the landscape and/or retention ponds through conscious cultivation patterns that work with the landscape topography. It has the effect of buffering the natural concentration of water towards valleys and reducing flooding.
- By minimizing the flow of water from ridges to valleys (using precise plow lines or mounds that fall slightly off contour), we can infiltrate it across the broadest possible area.
- In this respect, **keyline** strategies can be both a flood and drought mitigation strategy.
- This kind of water management has to potential to enhance the water efficiency of *any* existing production system, including pastured livestock, grass production, annual vegetable production and orchard/agro-forestry operations.

### **Phase 1**

To help educate the agricultural sector, an outreach initiative on stormwater best practices and green stormwater infrastructure will be developed by a consultant. A hands-on component will provide practical advice to implement best practices. The outreach initiative will meet the following objectives:

- Slow, sink and store rainwater;
- Low-carbon solutions for stormwater management
- Reduce soil erosion and flooding;
- Reduce pollution entering storm drains and local waterways;
- Improve nutrient retention
- Adapt to climate change
- Increase resilience of the region's agriculture system.

### **Phase 2**

- Working with the CRD representatives, the consultants will select four separate locations representative of the agricultural and rural areas within the CRD, to host the workshops in February and March 2023. Possible locations include Victoria, Saanich, the West Shore, Salt Spring Island, Pender Island.
- The workshops will be about 2 hours in length and will include a presentation covering the content/topics agreed to; an interactive, hands-on component; and an outside component that will demonstrate use of topographic information and **keyline** design.

### **Phase 3**

- Evaluation Report
  - Participants will be provided with an evaluation form to complete at the end of the workshop to assess overall satisfaction, identify which components were of the greatest value and interest, where additional/further efforts should be directed, willingness for follow-up discussion, and some participant interviews with the consultants to gain better detail and understanding of their experience in the workshop and of future needs/interests.
  - The evaluation report will provide an overall assessment of the success and value of the workshops and include a set of recommendations for future work on agricultural stormwater management in the CRD.

## **CORRESPONDENCE**

### **5550 West Saanich Road (Red Barn Market) – Boundary Adjustment – Referral from Saanich Planning**

Russ Benwell, one of the owners of the Red Barn Market, was present to elaborate on the application for a boundary adjustment to the Red Barn Market on West Saanich Road.

- A septic field and three easements run through the property and the adjacent 25-acre parcel owned by Brian Higgins.
- The request for a boundary adjustment around the septic field is a legal issue for Mr. Higgins.
- The Red Barn has been operating on the property since 2009 and the current zoning is Rural Commercial. Not all the land is within the ALR.
- The intent of the boundary adjustment, comprising about about 3/4 of an acre, is to take any liability for the septic field away from Mr. Higgins, and leave him access to his fields and the bridge.
- There is an easement through the Red Barn's parking lot to access the bridge.
- The area around the septic field cannot be used for any type of farming.
- This is not a subdivision application – but an amalgamation of the property around the barn building that stores animal feed.

The Commission thanked Mr. Benwell for attending the meeting to explain the application.

**MOTION:** Moved by Terry Michell and Seconded by Dianne Williamson: "That PAAC support the boundary adjustment application for the Red Barn Market at 5550 West Saanich Road."

CARRIED

## **AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: NEW**

### **Maber Flats** (Larry Sluggett)

- Central Saanich now owns 25 acres of Maber Flats.
- The previous owner created a lot of problems by starting to build a dyke using 3,000 truckloads of clay to address the flooding but they didn't complete the project.
- The ALC should issue a remediation order to finish the project that was started.
- A portion of Sluggett Farms backs onto Maber Flats; the flooding gets worse every year.
- Larry suggested that PAAC take a stand and lobby Central Saanich Council to address the flooding issues once and for all and he requested the matter to be placed on the January agenda.

Councillor Paltiel suggested that a representative from the District's Engineering Department be invited to the meeting to report on the current status and management of the property.

### **Avian Flu**

- The Ministry of Agriculture held a workshop on Salt Spring Island last month regarding the virus and its consequences if proper precautions are not taken.
- Katie attended the workshop and although it was a great workshop and she felt empowered, she was also skeptical because some people do not take care of their birds. This flu can affect the wild bird population too.
- A lot of her questions were answered regarding backyard management of birds.

### **Comments from the Regional Agrologist, Meghan Halstead**

- After five years, a new policy framework is being completed.
- More farms visits by agrologists can be expected in the future.
- More workshops are being planned.
- At this time, no additional district agrologists have been hired, but we have more industry specialists who will support the work of the agrologists.
- If PAAC has any ideas for workshops, let her know.
- Discussion noted that at one time agrologists such as Brent Warner visited farms every 10 days or so, helping farmers with many different issues and challenges.
- Meghan acknowledged this noting it has been challenging to get people with the right skills.
- She also acknowledged that climate change has had a massive impact on farming and food security but there are opportunities to bring in better management – such as water retention and storage, soil management, and linking agriculture to the *Water Sustainability Act*.
- She is excited about the shift in focus by the Ministry regarding the above initiatives.
- Councillor De Vries pointed out that the Ministry's budget is now over \$100 million, with the focus shifting from exports and now oriented towards local agriculture.

- Meghan noted there is no networking or information sharing vehicle on the Saanich Peninsula with young farmers. The Ministry is working on how they can support young farmers as well as helping with climate change issues. There are lots of projects underway.

### **50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the ALR**

Meghan was asked to find out what is happening with a proposed celebration for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ALR this year. What are the pros and cons of the ALR? How has it changed in the past 50 years? What are the benefits to farmers?

Carry for discussion at January meeting

## **AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: CURRENT**

### **a) Saanich Farm Worker Housing Policy update - Cameron Scott, Saanich Planning**

- The Farm Worker Housing Policy was scheduled for a Council meeting in August, 2022 but due to a heavy agenda was postponed; it will now be considered on November 21<sup>st</sup> by the new Council.
- The report is posted on the Saanich website [www.saanich.ca](http://www.saanich.ca)
- It is proposed the use Temporary Use Permits (TUP) for any buildings, similar to the District of Central Saanich's policy.
- TUPs are approved for a 3-year period, allowing for flexibility and can be renewed for another 3-year term if there have been no issues.
- Some of the key points of the Policy are:
  - Housing must be located on A-zoned property, which does not necessarily have to be within the ALR.
  - The farm must have farm tax status
  - There must be a demonstrated need, such as housing for seasonal and/or foreign workers.
  - There can be no impact to the agricultural productivity from the housing.
  - A TUP is a way to allow farm worker housing on a temporary basis, and it can be adjusted for certain circumstances when required.
- Depending on the site, there may be a need to send the application to the ALC.
- There are a few farms within Saanich that would be suitable for FWH – such as Galey's on Blenkinsop Road.

PAAC discussion noted there are some smaller farms in the Interurban & Burnside Road area; if the housing and other amenities could be on one farm but accessible for workers from all surrounding farms, it would make better sense.

Cam Scott stated:

- Applications and conditions will be reviewed on a case by case basis.
- A 4 ha parcel is the minimum size.
- The ALC threshold requires the housing to be 2,000 square feet.
- The needs of the farm may be spread across multiple parcels.
- There are horticulture farms in the Burnside Road area which do not have a lot of land.

- There must be a demonstrated need; even small parcels can have very intensive farming.
- The TUP provides the ability to adjust parameters.

Discussion noted that the ALC normally requires buildings be sited close to the road. As these buildings will be temporary, perhaps they could be located on a back portion of the property that is not actively farmed.

Cam Scott stated:

- Regarding location, topography and access will be some of the considerations.
- If an application does require ALC approval, their regulations will have to be adhered to.
- It would make a difference if the area in question is within the ALR or not.

**b) Water update – Mike Doehnel – Not Present**

The Secretary advised a request has been received from the CRD for PAAC to appoint an agriculture representative to the Saanich Peninsula Water Commission for 2023. Mike Doehnel agreed he would be willing to continue as the agriculture representative.

MOTION: Moved by Terry Michell and Seconded by Dianne Williamson: “That Mike Doehnel be appointed to the Saanich Peninsula Water Commission as the agricultural representative for 2023.”

CARRIED

**c) Education: – Linda Geggie (not present)**

**Spring Farm tour 2023 for New Council Members & others**

Agreed the tour would be open to newly elected Councillors as well as other Councillors, municipal staff, and CRD members & staff. Item to be placed on January agenda for discussion re decision on which farms, focus/themes, lunch location and date. Once date has been decided, a notice should be sent to the municipalities and the CRD to “Save the Date”.

**CARRY to January meeting**

**COMMENTS, UPDATES, CONCERNS RE FARMING OPERATIONS – no comments**

**OTHER BUSINESS**

**a) Vancouver Island Agriculture Adaptation Group – Bob Maxwell**

Max advised he has not heard anything from the Adaptation Group in a while. However, he did have 3 questions to ask farmers which may give the Ministry some awareness of farmers' situations and status regarding climate change.

**Question 1:** *Are you concerned with climate change and what worries you?* Agreed that farmers are very concerned about the effects of climate change.



**Question 2:** *Do you have access to good farm/climate information and read it?*

- Terry Michell advised he continues to work on irrigation ponds; he also removes the soil that comes to the top and replaces it with clay at the bottom of the ponds.
- Different forms of irrigation are used – such as drip lines and plastic pipes.

**Question 3:** *Have you done anything or made any changes to your operation?*

Most farmers are thinking about water, and the lack of it, and are concerned about whether they will be able to capture storm water from the land to use during dry spells and droughts, such as we had this summer and fall.

- With the weather extremes we have been experiencing – just 60 ml of rain followed by a 4-month drought, we could be doing a better job of capturing the winter storm water, and increasing the size of retention ponds.
- Encroachment and development continue to have an effect on water runoff.
- Some farmers were irrigating up to mid-October this year and yet during the early spring there was so much water on the fields, some crops had to be replanted.
- A farmer is considering installing a second waterline.
- Environmental Farm Plans are being reviewed.
- It is hoped more focus can be given to drainage issues by the municipalities: farmers continue to do more ditching around their properties so excess water doesn't ruin crops.
- Heat, also a major concern, resulted in some crop varieties being changed up. Green houses got too hot – which had not been a big problem in the past. Planting times can be adjusted to earlier in the year perhaps.
- One farmer who doesn't own the land she farms feels she is unable to invest in needed infrastructure – such as better drainage – because if she loses access to the land she has also lost her capital investment.
- Suggested that workshops could be held to review what coping tools and methods farmers are using to adapt to the severe climate changes....share knowledge with other farmers and perhaps have some experts on hand to offer advice.
- Due to the extreme heat for the past two years, a chicken farmer is looking at renovating the chicken barns to provide better venting and cooling systems. The cost could be \$2 million or more. There are federal grants available.
- A farmer in the Maber Flats area continues to have problems with flooding and drainage; this has been going on for a long time and is getting worse every year. Development pressure is also a problem. As well as the increased heat, heavy rains and then drought, this has been one of the windiest years experienced, and he lost 11 acres of row cover crops – a value of almost \$11,000 in a few hours.
- It is difficult to get drainage installed on Vancouver Island farms as all the installation businesses are on the mainland.
- A North Saanich farmer said they have a lot of drip irrigation and were not too affected by the drought this year. However, he expects there will be issues eventually. He used shade cloth on the berry crop and ended up with a good crop – but he has a small scale operation.
- Most of the 200 cherry trees on one farm had to be cut down due to poor pollination – which is also affected by climate change. The spring was too wet and cold for pollinators. On sunny days, a leaf blower was used to pollinate – and not very successfully.

- Inconsistent temperatures during April, May and June did not help matters. If the pollen is too wet, the bees cannot carry it – and with the cold temperatures, the bees didn't come out of the hives.
- b) New membership list will be prepared and emailed to members and member municipalities.
- c) Appointment of Agricultural representative to SPWC – see above – Mike Doehnel reappointed.
- d) ALR Subdivisions & Exclusions: General discussion on reporting process with Municipalities
  - Concern was noted that PAAC does not receive sufficient data to make an informed decision when referrals are received from municipalities to comment on ALR exclusions, subdivisions and change of land use applications.
  - Agreed there should be a clear set of criteria; carry for further discussion.

**UPCOMING EVENTS/WEBINARS** – nothing at this time

**NEXT MEETING:** The next PAAC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, January 12, 2023 at 7:00 pm at the Saanich Municipal Hall, Committee Room No. 2.

**ADJOURNMENT:** The meeting adjourned at 9:07 pm

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Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary