

MINUTES
PENINSULA AND AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
Held at Saanich Municipal Hall, Committee Room 2 and via MsTeams
Thursday, April 11, 2024, 7:07 p.m.

Present: Chair Robin Tunnicliffe; Linda Geggie; Jenni Michell (via Teams); Terry Michell (via Teams); Larry Sluggett; Katie Underwood; Dianne Williamson; and Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary.

Guests: Ted Robbins, CRD CAO; Glen Harris, Sr. Manager, Environmental Services, CRD; Noah Brotman, CRD, Megan Halstead, Regional Agrologist (7:50 pm); Cassidy Daskalchuck, Saanich Planning; Bob Maxwell; Shellie MacDonald, Haliburton Farms; Kathleen Zimmerman,

Regrets: Anita Bull, Councillors Paltiel (Central Saanich); De Vries (Saanich) and Marshall (North Saanich).

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOVED by Dianne Williamson and Seconded by Katie Underwood: “That the Minutes of March 14, 2024 be adopted as circulated.”

CARRIED

CHAIR'S REMARKS (the full report is attached to and forms part of these minutes)

Highlights:

- Dumping of fill on agricultural lands: there seems to be dump trucks carrying fill destined for farmland and now ads on Facebook searching for places to dump soil which compounds the feeling that farmland is not being properly cared for. With so much construction in our region, the fill has to go somewhere. We need controls that are enforced.
- PAAC's mandate is to “protect our land base”; the global state of agricultural land protection is grim. All the large food producing regions with higher populations, such as California, (approx. 100 people per km²) have more pressure on farmland than we do, (27 people per km²)
- With climate change and geopolitical unrest added to the equation, we are cutting out hundreds of thousands of formerly productive acres of land because there is no water, weather extremes, or other conflicts. People are frustrated with high food prices, but think about how high prices will be in the future. How do we get this message out?
- There's no better place to farm than on Vancouver Island. There's no better time to start than now. The way to get stable food prices is to get our land farmed at full capacity. Soil is a valuable resource that needs careful stewardship. How do we pitch this to our leaders and to our population, and how to we uphold ALR protection?

TREASURER'S REPORT

The Treasurer reported that we have a balance of \$17,315.66 in a GIC and \$1,458.53 in our chequing account.

COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE REMARKS – No Councillors present

SPEAKER'S BUREAU: No speakers scheduled

CORRESPONDENCE:

- α) Letter from PAAC to Jody Watson, CRD re implementation of the CRD's Goose Management Strategy.

Note the order of the Agenda was amended to accommodate the CRD representatives present to discuss the Goose Management Strategy.

**CRD Goose Management Strategy Implementation
Ted Robbins, CAO and Glen Harris, Sr. Manager, Environmental Services**

PAAC had sent a letter to Jody Watson at the CRD regarding the slow implementation of the Goose Management Strategy, the late start on addling, and the plan as to who will actually be doing the addling, particularly on farmlands.

Mr. Harris stated:

- The CRD will be taking over the egg addling program this year as GOOSE does not have the capacity.
- It is understood that nesting season will be at an end soon. We will be reaching out to various farmers to identify if they have geese on their land. The CRD will be working with First Nations on both the egg adding and the harvesting.
- A contract for the harvesting has been submitted to GOOSE for signature. A population survey will also be conducted during moulting season. Information will be shared with all stakeholders.
- A regional working group has been established; meetings will be held on a regular basis via Teams and PAAC is invited to participate. It was noted no invite had been received; Mr. Harris will look into this. Other participants include municipalities, major landowners, DND, and First Nations.

In response to questions from PAAC, Mr. Harris stated:

- Egg addling is on-going on both private and public lands. Invites have been extended to farmers to find the nests and addle the eggs.
- The CRD is working on the West Shore, golf courses, and Oak Bay as well as other areas trying to cover as wide an area as possible.
- He acknowledged the comment about 500+ geese behind the chicken barns at Firbank Farm on Island View Road and the fact that the owner cannot disturb the geese because they will fly over the barns, risking contamination.

Cassidy Daskalchuck, Saanich Planner, stated she understood from the initial working group meeting that local municipalities and other stakeholders are expected to contribute to the egg addling programs within their operational budgets. What happens if a stakeholder doesn't have the capacity to pay?

Mr. Harris stated:

- The larger landowners such as Victoria and Saanich have the capacity and resources to contribute and the CRD may be able to fill in the gaps.
- To access private properties, a signed waiver is required.
- In terms of help with addling, First Nations is very interested, as is the birding community and they will be paid. The Working Group will reach out for other volunteers and provide training. There will be some funds to provide honorariums.

- He acknowledged it has been a bit of a late start this year and based on information from the Working Group an earlier start is expected next year.
- He believes that it would be appropriate for farmers to addle eggs they find on their property; he will confirm this. Ideally, permits should be applied for.
- We have been trying to negotiate contract terms with GOOSE; a signed document is expected soon.
- He is aware that GOOSE has contracts with other areas and he agreed it will be helpful to build more capacity in the Capital Region for addling and harvesting.
- The CRD has a service but with limited funds; Samantha Hammond has been addling on a daily basis and a report will be presented to PAAC at a future meeting.
- The cost for harvesting will be expensive and there has to be a balance with addling. Putting a short term emphasis on addling will help to get the numbers down.

Comments from PAAC noted:

- Compiling an inventory of new nesting places seems a misappropriation of time and money as the geese can be found anywhere and farmers know where many of the sites are already.
- Rather than relying on volunteers, perhaps organize paid teams of university students involved in environmental studies or local high school students. Mr. Harris noted this is a good idea.

Other issues discussed with CRD representatives included Farmlands Access Program, the recent CRD purchase of the Royal Oak Golf Course, and the application of Bio-Solids

PAAC noted:

- The Farmlands Access Program has been discussed for some time and it appears that Bear Hill Farm is the officially accepted site. What are the CRD's intentions with this site and what is going to happen to help younger farmers access land?
- Younger farmers and producers are giving up because there is no affordable land. Timing is important – if the service isn't approved until late 2024, that likely means it will be another one to two years before anything happens.
- The Royal Oak Golf Course, an ALR designated property sitting idle for a number of years, was recently purchased by the CRD. It was questioned if this property could be farmed and if the CRD consulted with the ALC before purchasing the property.
- Questioned if the CRD had considered a land swap with the Rowing Club lands adjacent to Elk Lake, which are flat, and leave the rocky hilly site at Royal Oak for some other use.
- The Regional Growth Strategy and the Food Agriculture Strategy were completed by the CRD, a key priority for the Farmland Access Program. There was a lot of prioritization done at the time by the Food and Agriculture Task Force. The Strategies have now become dormant. Is there any intention to re-establish the Task Force or strike another committee to look at the identified key priorities? There is so much work to do here, and lots of people with expertise that can help.

Megan Halstead entered the meeting at 7:50 pm

In response, Mr. Robbins stated:

- The CRD operates 200 different established services.
- Before proceeding with the Farmlands Access Program in terms of funding, work plans, determining farmers and/or operators, it has to be established as a service.

- It is anticipated this will occur in the fall of 2024 depending on the number of other services being considered and staff capacity.
- The CRD Board has approved the concept, the bylaw is drafted and Bear Hill has been selected as the pilot project.
- Regarding the Royal Oak property, the CRD purchased this through the Regional Parks Service due to the proximity of Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park. The property could not be farmed today.
- Negotiations are underway with the First Nations who are interested in the property. There is a lot of interest from various groups and other uses are being proposed, including making it part of the parks system and farming of some sort. The process will take time.

Noah Brotman, CRD, stated:

- The soils on the Royal Oak Golf Course are hard packed and not ideal for farming after many years of use as a golf course.
- There could be some kind of farming however on part of the land, but testing of the soils would be required.
- Regarding the Regional Growth and Food Agriculture Strategy documents, it is intended to convene a meeting this year. Potentially the documents could be updated in 2026/27. However nothing is in the approved work plan right now.

Mr. Robbins stated:

- It has been some time since there has been an update on the status of the Regional Growth and Agriculture strategies; he will look into this.
- There are lots of ideas around the use of the Royal Oak property, which was purchased because of the proximity to Beaver Lake Park. The ALC was consulted prior to completing the purchase and preliminary conversations took place with the ALC and First Nations on the viability of the lands for agricultural use.
- There will be opportunities for the public to provide input on the use of the Royal Oak property.
- In terms of land swaps, we are open to all possibilities at this time.
- He will take the comments from PAAC to staff for consideration.

Land Application of Bio-Solids (Discussed at the February PAAC meeting)

Mr. Robbins suggested full discussion could take place at a future meeting, but noted the following in the meantime:

- The CRD is obligated to provide a long term plan for bio-solids by June 2024.
- We have been working on a plan for a few years since bio-solids were officially banned from use in 2011. Since that time, they have been stored at the Hartland Landfill site.
- Ten tonnes of bio-solids are produce daily – and we all contribute to that – and we need to find a solution. Over 1,200 chemicals can be found in the bio-solids.
- A report will be taken to the Board in May with the results of the public engagement survey that was done earlier this year, together with a draft long-term management strategy to be submitted to the province in June.
- The Board requested a time extension but to date this has not been granted by the province.
- Some members of the public and the Board are opposed to the land application of bio-solids and it puts the CRD in a difficult position as staff are obligated to comply with the legislation.
- We have to balance public opinion, information from the environmental experts since the 2011 ban, and provincial legislation. Some people will argue with the science behind the

legislation: the CRD will not review science aspect. Our role is managing the programs in compliance with the legislation.

- Mr. Robbins stated he will come to PAAC for feedback when the draft long-term management strategy is ready for review by the Board.
- When asked by the Chair if the CRD thought it was a responsible decision to use the bio-solids on a farm or in your own garden, Mr. Harris stated science backs its use and says it is safe when following the rules of OMRR (Organic Matter Recycling Regulations) It would depend on how the product is produced and applied. OMRR has tight controls and everything is tested before use.
- The long-term plan will include a proposal to thermally treat the product.
- It will be at least seven to ten years before a full-scale demonstration project is up and running. In the meantime, we must find a solution to manage the product.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: NEW

(a) Dumping of Fill on Farmland

A recent article in the Vancouver Sun shed light on the amount of fill being dumped on farmland. <https://vancouversun.com/news/local-news/bc-farmland-illegal-dumping>

Further to discussions at the March meeting, the Chair stated she has done some research on local bylaws that control the deposit of fill and found that they vary considerably from area to area.

- The Cowichan Valley has some good elements, whereas in her opinion Metchosin's bylaw needs some work.
- Most bylaws need a good review and updates to meet current standards.
- Sometimes people can be paid \$1,000 or more to allow soil to be dumped on their land.
- Permits to deposit the fill cost \$50.
- With the acceleration of development throughout the entire Capital Region, some stricter regulations are essential.
- She recalls the dumping that occurred on a property some years ago concrete, metal and contaminated soils were dumped, and now the pile is covered with grass, but contaminants are leaching into the soils.
- She will continue to research and report back to the Commission.

Discussion ensued:

- Projects over a certain size must have a registered plan on where the soils will be taken.
- Since 2022, Saanich has had 42 complaints about dumping – although some are repeats.
- The Saanich Agricultural Plan notes it is a priority to review the Deposit of Fill Bylaw and develop best practices. Cassidy suggested it would be a good opportunity to work with PAAC on this.
- Properties accepting fill should have signs posted noting how much will be deposited, where it is from and the dates it will be occurring. If illegal dumping is happening the property owner and the developer could be fined. Dumping soil accounts for 9% of construction cost.
- Developing a best practice for soil dumping would be a great service to the municipalities and perhaps this is something we should add to our agenda as a regular item and research bylaws in other municipalities. Noted Oregon has progressive farmland protection.

- In the ALC's annual report, 42% of environmental complaints refer to unauthorized fill. On the Island, six applications for dumping fill were received; only two were approved.
- When excavating marine clay soils and dumping them on farmland, they become an impermeable mass. Water cannot drain through the soil and runs into ditches instead; plants cannot root.

(b) CRA Lifetime Capital Exemption for Farmers (Larry Sluggett)

Larry handed out information providing details about the Lifetime Capital Exemption for Farms, noting that purchases after June 17, 1987 may be more complicated to qualify.

- He stated that most people are aware that if you own farmland you have a lifetime capital gains exemption of over \$1 million.
- It has recently been discovered that if you rent land out to a non-family member, you could lose your exemption.
- If the land is not farmed by a qualified person you also don't get the exemption.
- He suggested we should consider asking the CRA to come to a PAAC meeting and explain this clause as farmers don't realize they could negate the exemption.
- If a person dies and everything goes into your estate the CRA considers this a sale.
- Missing out on the exemption depends on the tax rate, but it would likely be a minimum of \$10,000 to \$20,000. People are not aware of this.
- The exemption was created to help farmers with inter-generational transfers; if we didn't have this, there would be capital gains against the property.

Discussion noted:

- This could discourage farmers from leasing land.
- Apparently the purpose of the rule is to prevent land speculation.

CARRY for further discussion at the next meeting
once everyone has had an opportunity to review the information.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: CURRENT

- a) Water Update: Mike Doehnel (not present)
- b) South Island Farmers' Institute Update – Katie Underwood & Shellie MacDonald
 - They are still waiting to hear if the grant application to the Ministry of Agriculture and Food is successful.
- c) CRD Foodlands Access Programme – Noah Broatman (see discussion page 3)
- d) CRD Goose Management Strategy (see discussion on page 1)

Terry Michell stated:

- According to his discussions with Graeme Fowler, there appears to be a disagreement with the CRD over the financial compensation for addling and harvesting. GOOSE doesn't want to miss the addling opportunities this year.
- GOOSE has been working with First Nations on the Peninsula and the Gulf Islands using funds from PAAC, Butler Brothers, three golf courses and private contractors.
- As far as he understood, the CRD was only going to operate on public lands, but now it appears they are being paid by some golf courses to addle and harvest.
- The Airport Authority has their own staff working on goose controls; there are a lot of

farms near the airport. Nothing is being done at the sea plane base at Ocean Sciences in Patricia Bay and there are many geese in this area.

Farmers are calling the CRD on a daily basis reporting goose activity and hot spots.

- The CRD has been reaching out to larger farms.
- With respect to the CRD's proposal for municipalities to provide funding and perhaps provide staff to addle eggs: this would be an individual decision to fund the program, and was only recently disclosed. It will take time for municipalities to approve funding as part of their budgets.
- Regarding the Gulf Islands, the Islands Trust may not have sufficient funds to contribute.
- Suggested a joint meeting with the CRD and GOOSE could be explored.

OTHER BUSINESS

a) Vancouver Island Agriculture Adaptation Group – Bob Maxwell

- Bob Maxwell circulated a brief water survey to PAAC members and a few responses have been received. All responses to date indicate people are aware and concerned about climate change.
- The best way to deal with climate change is to team up with different people and organizations; Katie will be helping to review the responses and will circulate the survey to SIFI members.
- Some people have noted they don't have the resources to keep up to date with climate change initiatives and new water patterns.
- Things to consider in light of climate change would be adapting water systems, mulching, using different crop varieties that are drought tolerant and adding misting systems to livestock barns.
- Max went to a few farms and the farmers were happy to see him and share information.
- Linda noted that in 2018, the Farmer2Farmer workshop was talking about climate change. Now people are using more specialized technology and strategies. Crops such as peaches and grapes are now being grown as far north as Fort St. John. She offered to help Max compile the data received.

b) Vancouver Island AgriService Newsletter – Meghan Halstead

- Link to sign up for the newsletter – published quarterly:
- https://agriservicebc.campayn.com/contact_list_form/signup/110236

c) 2023 Annual Report

The final reports and information have now been submitted. The draft report was circulated and some amendments received. The secretary will now work on finalizing the report which will hopefully be ready for distribution within the next week or two.

Late Item

The Commission was saddened to hear about the passing of John Pendray, one of the founders of PAAC and it's first Chair. It was suggested that a donation be made in his name to SIFI.

MOVED by Linda Geggie and Seconded by Larry Sluggett: “That PAAC make a \$500

contribution to SIFI in John Pendray's name in acknowledgement for his many years of service to the agricultural community and through SIFI, lend support to new farmers in the agricultural community."

CARRIED

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, May 9, 2024 in Committee Room #2 at the Saanich Municipal Hall.

Robin Tunnicliffe, Chair

I hereby certify these minutes are accurate.

Isobel Hoffmann, Senior Committee Secretary