POSSIBLE APPROACHES TO AID IN REGIONAL COORDINATION OF AGRICULTURAL MATTERS

At the November 13, 2014 Peninsula & Area Agricultural Meeting (PAAC), Commission members reviewed a discussion paper prepared by the Chair on possible approaches to aid in regional coordination of agricultural matters.

The following motion was passed:

"That PAAC endorse the Chair’s report “Possible Approaches by PAAC to aid in Regional Coordination of Agricultural Matters”; that PAAC pursue the identified options for implementation of the report’s suggested actions, and further that the report be referred to the municipalities for comment."

Accordingly, attached is a report for Council’s information on possible approaches that could see regional coordination on various agricultural matters.

PAAC welcomes your thoughts and comments on this proposed approach for improving coordination and informed responses in a timely and consistent manner.

An excerpt of the minutes from the November 13 meeting is attached for your additional information.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Mike Romaine, Chair
Peninsula and Area Agricultural Commission

Member Municipalities:
Saanich, Central Saanich, North Saanich, Metchosin and Sidney
At its November 13, 2014 meeting, the Peninsula and Area Agricultural Commission (PAAC) reviewed a discussion paper on Possible Approaches by PAAC to aid Regional Coordination on Agricultural matters. As a starting point, PAAC respectfully submits the following information for Councils’ review and comment.

Preamble

Over the past 16 years, PAAC has dealt with the following categories of issues:

1. Plans/proposals for subdivision of ALR lands
2. Boundary adjustments within ALR lands
3. Composting proposals and requirements
4. New types of developments on Agricultural lands, eg. Medical Marijuana facilities
5. Waste disposal on Agricultural lands
6. Up zoning – rezoning of Agricultural lands
7. Development, form and structures on Agricultural Lands
8. GMO’s
9. Drainage and irrigation issues
10. Pest management: Geese and Deer
11. Agricultural Development and Food Strategies
12. Farmland trust and access
13. Education and outreach
14. Provincial, Federal policies and programs: eg. Changes to the ALR

Discussion

There appears to be an increasing demand on PAAC for advice – which reflects the growing pressures and awareness of the importance and pressures being placed on Agricultural lands. There are many issues that contribute to these pressures and the result has been increasing workloads on all participants at municipal and regional levels, as well as on voluntary advisory groups such as PAAC. Recently PAAC had an expanded mandate approved to address regional-wide issues and therefore it is appropriate to consider and initiate discussions on possible approaches by PAAC to aid Regional Coordination on Agricultural matters
Possible Approaches

1. Development of PAAC Screening guidelines to apply to all referrals related to subdivision, change of use, rezoning, boundary adjustments, development, form and structure that enlarge the footprint on ALR lands.
   - Such guidelines could request such information to be consistent across the region such as maps showing soils and land capability ratings for the entire property under question, at a scale that it is easy to determine which parcels of land are involved in the proposal being considered.
   - A statement and analysis on the net loss or gain of agricultural lands. PAAC should be promoting a position of *no net loss* of comparable agriculture lands and thus an analysis should be provided as to how any loss will be mitigated and replaced.
   - The rationale as to why rezoning is necessary and for what purpose; this should be linked to a longer, realistic plan for the property in question.

2. In addition to the above general screening guidelines for handling specific development proposals, prepare overview statements of suggested requirements for plans and proposals that have regional implications and need regional coordination by agencies in the Capital Region.
   - Examples include Medical Marijuana facilities: preferred locations with respect to non-ALR lands, and if unavoidable, location required on ALR lands so as to minimize impacts on the property on which the proposal is slated and impacts on adjacent lands and owners.
   - Disposal of waste material/fill. In such cases, these should be referred to PAAC and include the rationale for location being considered. An impact assessment on the property receiving the fill, as well as adjacent owners, including an assessment of runoff, erosion and risk of contamination of lands including receiving properties.
   - Composting facilities: PAAC has in the past raised a number of concerns over this important topic. These concerns should be consolidated and provided to all municipalities. The bottom line is that compost should be considered a regional resource with priority given for farmers to have access to this resource.
   - Drainage and irrigation issues: As above, all plans including new subdivisions should contain an overview including maps of water courses, drainage channels and how overflows reflect downstream lands within the watershed where such proposals are located.
• Pest Management: Deer and Geese. This has considerable PAAC involvement and cooperation with numerous agencies. We need to maintain a presence and to ensure awareness for matters related to agricultural lands and crops in the region as a whole.

3. Emerging initiatives such as Agricultural Development, Food Strategies, Farmland Trusts, education and outreach and governmental policies and programs.
   • Respond to requests on various topics; undertake initiatives to become better informed on topic areas, such as through guest speakers.
   • Identify and bring forward ongoing issues that affect agriculture in our area of interest such as local food security, viable farms, open space, community culture and social structure.

4. Enunciate PAAC’s position(s) on topics such GMO’s, maintenance of regional agrarian history and culture, the importance of regional approaches to key areas such as access to composting resources, water, and support services, including government funded agricultural extension officers.

How can the above suggestions be advanced? Options include:

A. Have PAAC volunteer commission members begin work on reviewing previous positions by PAAC and develop screening guidelines for #1 above. These guidelines would then be issued to municipalities for review and feedback.

B. Develop a set of terms of reference and seek funding from possible sources to have a consultant hired to review existing PAAC positions on topics identified above for PAAC’s for review and adoption.

C. Develop a process and procedure concurrently or in advance requesting the opportunity to meet with municipalities and regional government to present PAAC’s approach, with the desire to develop the above guidelines, principles, etc., in collaboration with governments in the Peninsula and the Region.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mike Romaine, Chair
Peninsula and Area Agricultural Commission

cc: PAAC members
    PAAC Council representatives
AGRICULTURAL ISSUES – CURRENT

Report from the Chair regarding possible approaches by PAAC to aid in regional coordination of agricultural matters. A copy of the report was circulated to Commission members.

The Chair reviewed his report and noted:

- PAAC has considered many issues over the years, including plans/proposals for subdivision of ALR lands; boundary adjustments within ALR lands; composting; new types of developments on agricultural lands (Medical Marijuana facilities); waste disposal on agricultural lands; up zoning/rezoning of agricultural lands; development form and structures on agricultural lands; GMO’s; drainage and irrigation issues; pest management (geese and deer); agricultural development and food strategies; farmland trust and access; education and outreach; and Provincial and Federal policies and programs (changes to the ALR).
- It might be helpful to the municipalities if PAAC provided some "screening guidelines", to apply to all referrals related to subdivision, change of use, rezoning, boundary adjustments, development form and structure that enlarge the footprint on ALR lands.
- There appears to be an increasing demand on PAAC for advice – which reflects the growing pressures on Agricultural lands.
- Many issues that contribute to these pressures and the result has been increasing workloads on all participants at municipal and regional level as well as on voluntary advisory groups such as PAAC.
- Recently PACC had an expanded mandate approved to address regional wide issues and therefore it is appropriate to consider and initiate discussions on possible approaches by PAAC to aid Regional Coordination on Agricultural matters.
- Such guidelines could request such information to be consistent across the region such as:
  - Soil, drainage and wetland analysis
  - Land capabilities
  - Analysis on net loss or gain of ALR
  - Rationale for rezoning
  - Pest management issues (deer/geese)
  - Ecological and environmental values of the site
- He noted if funding were available a consultant or student could be hired to review the many important issues (some noted above) that PAC has considered over the past 16 years and extract information to form the basis for the guidelines.
- The rationale presented by Saanich to support the Beclwith Farms proposal was understandable, with excellent maps, and was well-received; PAAC supported the project.
- When considering the redevelopment of the Roost property in Central Saanich, PAAC provided guidelines for future developments which were well received.
- In addition to general screening guidelines for handling specific development proposals, he offered suggestions for proposals that have a regional impact or need regional coordination, such as medical marijuana facilities, disposal of waste materials and fill, composting facilities, drainage and irrigation issues, and pest management control.
The Chair's report outlined options on how the above suggestions can be implemented. These options include:

1. Have PAAC volunteer commission members begin work on reviewing previous positions by PAAC and develop screening guidelines, to be provided to the Municipalities for review and feedback.
2. Develop terms of reference and seek funding from possible sources to hire a consultant to review existing PACC positions on topics identified above for review and adoption.
3. Develop a process and procedure concurrently or in advance requesting the opportunity to meet with Municipalities and Regional government to present PAAC's approach with the desire to develop the above guidelines, principles etc in collaboration with governments in the Peninsula and Region.

The report was well received by members, and discussion ensued on how to move forward. It is unsure how much a consultant would cost to review and assemble the information. Suggested the municipalities may provide some additional grant monies to assist, or perhaps we would be eligible for a grant under the Strategic Outreach Programme, mentioned by Rob Kline at the October meeting. Or, rather than a consultant, a university student could be hired for a lower cost.

Linda Geggie, not present at the meeting, submitted written comments on the Chair's report, noting that a meeting with CR-Fair, CRD ad hoc working groups on the Food Strategy and representatives from municipal agricultural advisory committees, including the soon to be formed Saanich Food Security Task Force should be arranged to talk about the issues on the table, see where there is overlap and opportunities for coordination. She could help arrange such a meeting for the spring.

MOTION: Moved by Bob Maxwell and Seconded by Bev Marley: "That PAAC endorse the Chair's report "Possible Approaches by PAAC to aid in Regional Coordination of Agricultural Matters"; that PAAC pursue the identified options for implementation of the report's suggested actions, and further that the report be referred to the municipalities for comment."

CARRIED