

REGIONAL DISTRICT OF BULKLEY-NECHAKO

AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE MEETING
(Committee Of The Whole)

Thursday, June 8, 2017

PRESENT: Chair Mark Parker

Directors Taylor Bachrach
Eileen Benedict
Shane Brien
Mark Fisher
Tom Greenaway
Rob MacDougall
Bill Miller
Rob Newell
Jerry Petersen
Darcy Repen
Gerry Thiessen – arrived at 11:20 a.m.

Directors John Illes, Village of Burns Lake
Absent Dwayne Lindstrom, Village of Fraser Lake
Thomas Liversidge, Village of Granisle

Alternate Linda McGuire, Village of Granisle
Directors Susan Schienbein, Village of Burns Lake

Staff Melany de Weerd, Chief Administrative Officer
Jason Llewellyn, Director of Planning – arrived at 11:04 a.m.
Roxanne Shepherd, Chief Financial Officer
Corrine Swenson, Manager of Regional Economic Development
Wendy Wainwright, Executive Assistant

Other John Stevenson, Regional Agrologist, Sector Development
Branch, Smithers, Ministry of Agriculture

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Parker called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m.

AGENDA

Moved by Director Miller
Seconded by Director MacDougall

AG.2017-4-1

“That the Agriculture Committee Agenda of June 8, 2017 be adopted.”

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

MINUTES

Agriculture Committee
Meeting Minutes
-April 20, 2017

Moved by Director Brien
Seconded by Director Greenaway

AG.2017-4-2

“That the Minutes of the Agriculture Committee Meeting of April 20, 2017 be received.”

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. Agriculture Coordinator

Director Miller, RDBN staff and Chair Parker met with Susan Stearns, General Manager, Community Futures Fraser-Fort George regarding a Beyond the Market Program update. Community Futures Fraser-Fort George spoke to the departure of its Beyond the Market Coordinator and receiving grant funding from the Rural Dividend Fund. The funding focused on the Fraser-Fort George region and they wouldn't be providing the outreach to the RDBN as they had in previous years. There was discussion in regard to:

- The ability to deliver the program as before:
 - A cross regional program;
 - At funding levels that were previously provided from the RDBN to the Beyond the Market Program;
 - If the RDBN contributed dollars - could potentially do some work in the RDBN.

In the discussion regarding the RDBN considering an Agriculture Coordinator Position, Community Futures Fraser-Fort George indicated that they felt it would be better for the RDBN to have its own program similar to Beyond the Market. Community Futures Fraser-Fort George (CFFFG) would continue to provide support and communicate to address cross regional topics and issues. CFFFG is moving its focus to export based production but continues to be available to support producers in the RDBN.

Agriculture Coordinator Position

- Chair Parker provided direction to staff to investigate potential funding sources for an Agriculture Coordinator;
- Although outside Northern Development Initiative Trust (NDIT) Board policy, RDBN staff are recommending submitting an application to NDIT. Proposal could include:
 - A 2 year pilot project;
 - A grant request of 2/3 of the project cost.

Budget

- Could potentially utilize the \$5,000 from the RDBN budget that had previously been used for the Beyond the Market program;
- If the Agriculture Committee recommends moving forward with an Agriculture Coordinator a full job description/salary/competencies etc. would move to the RDBN Executive Committee for consideration and the RDBN Board of Directors;
- Currently the Agriculture Coordinator is based on receiving grant funding – further consideration by the Regional Board would need to take place if the funding is not available.

Potential Coordinator Tasks

- Concern:
 - Don't want to take away from the support provided to local agriculture groups currently in place;
- Want to ensure an Agriculture Coordinator assists to empower, encourage, support groups that are currently in place;
- Want to also have the ability to provide grant funding assistance where applicable to agriculture groups along with in-kind works;
- Community and volunteer groups work hard to grow and enhance agriculture in the region.

Director Repen mentioned that it is important to move forward with support for the agriculture tasks. He noted that the agriculture industry creates a high level of financial contribution and there needs to be recognition of the positive impact agriculture has in the region. Director Repen spoke to the necessity of creating an agriculture research facility in the region in order to assist in the development of agriculture growth, knowledge and technologies for sustainable production similar to the Summerland Research and Development Centre.

DISCUSSION ITEMS (CONT'D)

1. Agriculture Coordinator (Cont'd)

Discussion took place regarding NDI's policy in regard to funding salaries. NDI has funded Grant Writer, Intern and Economic Development Positions and RDBN staff believe that there is a strong case to pursue funding for an Agriculture Coordinator.

Chair Miller mentioned that while in attendance at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities Conference on June 1-4, 2017 in Ottawa, Ontario discussions took place regarding food security and supplying food to domestic markets. He reported that there was strong messaging in regard to the world demand for food increasing and domestic food production is also a growing market. He also noted that in 2011 the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition (OBAC) formed the Northern Agriculture Research Initiative (NARI) and work was completed to improve the capacity and profitability of the agriculture and agri-food sector of northern B.C. He noted that many of the projects that were completed and are being completed in the Agriculture sector are working in isolation of one another. He commented that it would be beneficial to have an Agriculture Coordinator to leverage opportunities and coordinate activities of groups working in the region. He spoke of attending the Bulkley Valley Food Security Workshop in Smithers and mentioned that a number of the individuals in attendance are involved in other agriculture groups and spoke to having a coordinator that would assist in moving agriculture forward in the region.

John Stevenson, Regional Agrologist, Ministry of Agriculture spoke of the parallels in the region similar to the Kootenay region. He has been in conversations with the Columbia Basin Trust in regard to the Farm Business Advisory Services, a Ministry of Agriculture program that provides specialists to assist farming that encompasses human resources, production economics, farm succession, marketing and business planning. The program is cost shared with the majority funded by the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA). The MoA is considering reviewing the qualifications to allow for less restrictions. Challenges have been identified where farmers know the program exists but there is a lack of specialists to provide the services in the north and Kootenay regions of B.C. He mentioned that perhaps through Community Futures there may be an opportunity to have experts come to the region to provide train the trainer workshops to build regional capacity.

Mr. Stevenson also commented that it would be beneficial to obtain and utilize the materials and research completed by Beyond the Market for the region. He commended the Agriculture Committee for recognizing the need for an Agriculture Coordinator in the region and he is fully supportive of the initiative.

Discussion took place regarding a number of the tasks outlined in the draft Agriculture Coordinator Position paper being tasks that were the role of the province of B.C. in the past. The north now receives less services from the Province. There are three Ministry of Agriculture Agrologists in northern B.C. including the Peace River, Fraser-Fort George, Kitimat-Stikine and North Coast Regional Districts.

Chair Parker noted that the potential Coordinator tasks outlined are an initial framework and there is a broad range of potential tasks that can be more clearly established by the Regional Board moving forward.

Director Greenaway spoke of the need to support the agriculture industry as well as the mining and forestry industries due to the possible future changes in both forestry and mining. Chair Miller mentioned in the past 10 years the Agriculture Industry is the only industry that has shown year over year positive growth. He also noted the competitive advantage that is in the region in regard to what is needed for agriculture, energy and water. Director Petersen expressed caution to ensure an Agriculture Coordinator is what is needed in the region. He explained a past situation with an agrologist that was relocated from Vanderhoof to Prince George. Chair Parker mentioned that in attending meetings with different associations in the region they expressed appreciation when they have received assistance addressing such issues as rail crossing blockages. The groups have also been receptive to the RDBN Agriculture Committee.

DISCUSSION ITEMS (CONT'D)

1. Agriculture Coordinator (Cont'd)

Discussion took place in regard to organizations such as the Cattlemen's Associations being pioneers and leaders in their areas of expertise but there are a number of emerging agriculture sectors that require support and coordination of services. Director Repen mentioned the importance of investing in an industry that is in demand. Mr. Stevenson spoke to the agriculture sector gaining a higher profile. He commented that there is such a varying degree of operations investigating and researching options in farming such as a haskap berry orchard looking at the long term possibility of a distillery and grain producers investigating options for malting barley. He expressed the need for assistance in further developing agriculture in the region.

Discussion took place in regard to the need for political will from upper levels of the provincial government for the agriculture industry.

Director Miller mentioned that NDIT has provided support in the forestry sector and is now investigating options for agriculture sector initiatives. Chair Parker commented that the cost for the agriculture coordinator would be shared by the Regional Economic Development and Planning Departments. Jason Llewellyn, Director of Planning indicated that one of the Agriculture Coordinator tasks for the Planning Department would be to process the Agriculture Land Reserve (ALR) applications and provide reports in regard to crown land grant applications.

Corrine Swenson, Regional Manager of Economic Development spoke to clarifying how the Regional Board sees the position working, what kind of tasks the position should include and what success will look like after the two year period for the NDIT application. Discussion took place about changing the title of the Agriculture Coordinator to Agriculture/Economic Development Officer. Melany de Weerd, CAO commented that the information will be beneficial for the Regional Board also to build successes moving forward. The position may provide a better opportunity for information to be provided to the Regional Board in its consideration of applications regarding agriculture.

Ms. Swenson noted that in developing and producing the Connecting Consumers brochure feedback has been very positive from the various farming groups in regard to having on the ground contact and support in promoting their organizations, businesses and operations. Ms. Swenson mentioned that the Agriculture Coordinator will continue to build relationships and determine what is required in the region for the agriculture sector and take the initiatives to develop projects and further funding opportunities.

Director Brienen mentioned the need to develop an inventory of specialists to improve resources and capacity in the region.

Director MacDougall commented that in the past the municipalities have provided support to Beyond the Market. He suggested that a letter be sent to the municipalities requesting support for an Agriculture Coordinator for the region.

Moved by Director Miller
Seconded by Director Repen

AG.2017-4-5

"That the Agriculture Committee recommend that the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako Board of Directors direct staff to investigate potential funding sources and research an Agriculture Coordinator Position; and further, that an application to Northern Development Initiative Trust (NDIT) be drafted including comments from the RDBN Board of Directors in regard to the Agriculture Coordinator position; and further that the draft NDIT application be brought forward to a future RDBN Board meeting for consideration."

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

DISCUSSION ITEMS (CONT'D)

1. Agriculture Coordinator (Cont'd)

Director Thiessen commented that there is a need to build education and capacity in regard to agriculture. Discussion also took place in regard to the success measurements for the project/position.

The Regional Board can provide input to staff in regard to the Agriculture Coordinator Position. The timeline for the application to be submitted to NDIT staff and Board of Directors and the RDBN Executive and Board of Directors was discussed.

2. UBCM – Session Proposal – Agriculture

Director Fisher brought forward the possibility of developing a session proposal for the 2017 UBCM convention. He spoke to determining if the Agriculture Committee is in favour of submitting an Agriculture session proposal, timeline to develop a session and whether it should be a clinic or workshop. Director Fisher mentioned that staff workloads may be full to provide a submission for this year. Director Parker also noted his schedule is very full at this time. The deadline for submission is June 23, 2017. Ms. de Weerdts mentioned that if the Regional Board moves forward with an Agriculture Coordinator they may be able to assist in developing a very well prepared application for a future UBCM workshop. Discussion took place in regard to time constraints for both staff and the Regional Board of Directors.

UBCM Agriculture Session
Proposal - 2018

Moved by Director Repen
Seconded by Director Miller

AG.2017-4-4

“That the Agriculture Committee recommend that the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako Board of Directors submit an agriculture session Proposal for the 2018 Union of B.C. Municipalities Convention.”

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

CORRESPONDENCE

Correspondence

Moved by Director Miller
Seconded by Alternate Director McGuire

AG.2017-4-3

“That the Agriculture Committee receive the following:
correspondence:

-Beyond the Market – Annual Report 2016/2017;
-A Guide to On-Farm Demonstration Research;
-Vancouver Sun – B.C. Real Estate: Speculators Target
Farmland After Foreign Buyer Tax Introduced;
-BC Farmers Eligible for Funding – BC’s Buy Local Program.”

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) Convention – June 1-4, 2017 – Ottawa, ON

Rural Town Hall

Director Miller attended the Rural Town Hall Workshop while in attendance at FCM June 1-4, 2017. The panel of rural leaders and experts included MP Francis Drouin (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, ON). He serves as a member on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. Chair Miller mentioned that Mr. Drouin has a very strong agriculture background. During the session export issues, marketing, farming products, food sustainability and security was discussed. At the end of the session Chair Miller had an opportunity to speak about the foreign land ownership issue in the RDBN, agricultural lands being planted with trees for carbon offsets. He also brought forward the issue in regard to the accumulation of large tracts of agriculture land for industrial export projects and the impacts to local markets. He spoke of being open to investment but outlined the concerns in regard to the impacts to the region. He brought forward the BC Government's tax on urban real estate having an impact to agricultural lands. He provided an outline of the Regional Board's desire for a national strategy in regard to foreign ownership. Mr. Drouin requested the background information that Chair Parker and Director Thiessen presented to the Senate Committee on Agriculture. Mr. Drouin spoke of the Senate Committee needing to move the information forward to the House of Commons. Chair Miller spoke with Scott Ross, Director of Business Management and Farm Policy. He provides background information and research to the Federal Government. He also requested the RDBN background information in regard to foreign land ownership. He is currently working with UNBC and two other Universities across Canada in regard to agricultural land development. Chair Parker noted that he will provide the information to Mr. Drouin and Mr. Ross. Director Parker will also contact David Connell, Associate Professor, UNBC.

Director Thiessen mentioned that there is a need for the RDBN to develop a policy in regard to an agriculture development strategy in the region. He spoke of the impacts of large tracts of lands being owned by companies and individual owners. Director Thiessen noted the benefits of small scale farmers. Chair Miller mentioned that the Universities are working on the issue and commented that it would be helpful to have Mr. Connell attend a future meeting.

Director Repen spoke of identifying areas in the region for small plot intensive farming, range lands, etc. and quantifying the information to bring forward to the ALR and the Ministry of Agriculture. Mr. Llewellyn mentioned that small plot farming lands is the most comprehensively discussed issue during an Official Community Plan (OCP) review and when completing the Agriculture Land Use Plan for the region. He noted that the potential negative impact in the long term prevents the debate from moving forward. He commented that in 10-15 years 80-90% of small plot lands will be owned by non-farmers and that is one of the reasons the ALR hesitates to move forward with any changes to allow small plot farming. Mr. Llewellyn indicated that solutions have been brought forward utilizing covenants on property titles when subdividing parcels that would identify that the property could only be used for agriculture purposes. The ALR indicated they would object to an OCP that includes such a proposal. Director Repen spoke to protecting the land and encouraging high intensity production.

Mr. Stevenson mentioned that there is soil capability rating data available. It could be used to determine the best crop for the best capability and location. It would assist Planners to identify the best use and capabilities for pockets of agricultural lands. He mentioned that it could also be a tool used by the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations Crown Land division.

Director Fisher brought forward the need to understand the economic impact of small land agriculture. He suggested that taxation could be used for small plot farm lands that are not being used for agriculture to make it prohibitive to use the lands for anything but agriculture. He mentioned bringing the issues forward to a future Agriculture meeting to identify key concerns, items to address those concerns and create an action plan to move forward.

NEW BUSINESS

Frank Leonard, Chair
Agricultural Land Commission

Director Thiessen mentioned that Frank Leonard, Chair, Agricultural Land Commission will be in the region in the near future. He will be in the Peace River Regional District prior to June 22, 2017. Chair Parker will contact the ALC.

Winter Kill in the Vanderhoof Area

Chair Parker mentioned that there has been approximately 25,000 acres of winter kill of hay crops in the Vanderhoof area. He spoke to the seriousness of the issue and that there are discussions taking place in an attempt to mitigate the impact to the farmers in the area.

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Alternate Director McGuire
Seconded by Director Repen

AG.2017-4-6

“That the meeting be adjourned at 12:31pm.”

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Mark Parker, Chair

Wendy Wainwright, Executive Assistant